

R-604-ARPA

March 1971

AN ESSAY ON VIETNAMIZATION

Guy J. Pauker

A Report prepared for
ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY

Rand
SANTA MONICA, CA. 90406

This research is supported by the Advanced Research Projects Agency under Contract No. DAHC15 67 C 0142. Views or conclusions contained in this study should not be interpreted as representing the official opinion or policy of Rand or of ARPA.

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PREFACE

UNAVOIDABLY, INTUITIVE JUDGMENT plays a major role in an essay of this nature, which requires the blending of "hard" data with "soft" opinions. The author will therefore try to articulate his biases to help the reader discount interpretations that reflect not so much reality as wishful thinking.

Public revulsion against the horrors of the war in Vietnam, which have haunted us through all the media for over six years, is creditable. But excessive guilt feelings are detrimental to nations as well as to individuals. The author has always believed that we should not have interfered in the struggle in Indochina. But he also feels strongly that it would now make matters worse if, in response to an unconscious urge for self-punishment, we were to forego the opportunity to achieve the major goal of our intervention and allow by default a Communist victory. The confidence of the American people in their form of government could be shaken if the sacrifices of the last six years appeared to have been made in vain. And the "lesson" of our defeat is more likely to benefit our enemies and destabilize the global political environment than to help the next generation of American policymakers avoid the mistakes of the recent past.

No policy analysis can be based exclusively on cold logic. Goals and values have to be clarified before a rational choice can be made between alternative means. Having stated his preference for an outcome of the war that would not result in the control of South Vietnam by the Lao Dong Party, the author wants to point out that he is fully aware of the dangers of myopic optimism. But it is even more harmful to try to avoid disappointment by stubbornly denying the possibility of success.

This essay is the result of a drastic change in the author's outlook on the war. From January 1955, when the author first visited South Vietnam, until January 1970, he did not believe that the policy pursued by the United States could succeed. The primary reason for his pessimism was not the strength of the Viet Cong, although he always had a healthy respect for their capability and dedication, or even the formidable effectiveness of revolutionary warfare, but the character of the Vietnamese anti-Communist elites.

Most of what the author knows about Vietnamese public life he has learned from numerous conversations with members of the Vietnamese elite over a period of fifteen years. As a brooding student of Third World politics, he understood that the personalities of these elites have been shaped in the atmosphere of insecurity and turmoil of the last three decades. But although knowledge of their personal history elicited compassion rather than contempt for the South Vietnamese elites, this did not alter his conclusion that the odds were low that a viable nation-state could be built without a greater degree of civic morality than was currently operative in South Vietnam.

Early in 1970, the author began to realize that the enormous input of American resources of the last five years may have accomplished a feat of political alchemy, namely the transformation of the government of South Vietnam into a regime that could be viable if it continued to receive massive American material aid and if it accepted as a fact of life continuing low-level Communist violence.

Additional reflection and close scrutiny of the events of 1970 have since strengthened the author's conviction that the balance of military forces in South Vietnam is constantly shifting to the detriment of the Communists. If his assessments are correct, then important policy conclusions follow with regard to the options available to the United States to terminate direct American involvement in the war. In this essay the author ponders some of those policy implications.

The war in Vietnam is a national obsession, and we are inundated with information in newspapers, periodicals, and books. The author did not consider it useful to engage in spurious scholarship by footnoting well-known facts. But the data used here have been checked carefully and can be considered reliable within the limits of what is required as premises for logical arguments.

SUMMARY

NEGOTIATIONS and Vietnamization cannot be pursued simultaneously, with equal chances of success. In order to maximize the odds that the end result of negotiations would be a viable non-Communist regime in South Vietnam, conditions would have to prevail in that country very different from those required for a successful policy of Vietnamization. Negotiations presuppose a political system in which the Communist Lao Dong Party could participate. Vietnamization, in contrast, presupposes the development of a South Vietnamese government capable of holding its own against the Communists.

In preparation for open competition with the Communists, numerous political groups would have to be given a chance to express opinions, organize, and campaign, as it is impossible to predict which among the many parties are the most likely to secure substantial popular support. The political system would also have to encourage the natural selection of political leaders, which has never been possible in the past.

Furthermore, the non-Communist political forces would have to be willing to form alliances or coalitions so as not to splinter excessively the votes that would not be given to the Lao Dong Party, but recent Vietnamese political history indicates that such political mobilization is not likely to succeed. Therefore the political preparations in South Vietnam that would rationally accompany active negotiations are bound to increase instability and uncertainty in the political life of the country.

By contrast, Vietnamization requires a stable government, accepted if not actively supported by the population, having the authority to direct continued armed resistance against Communist violence, especially at a time when the morale of the Vietnamese armed forces is being tested

by the withdrawal of American combat forces and may also be challenged by renewed NVA/VC offensives. Vietnamization is therefore much more than transferring equipment to the South Vietnamese and training them to use and maintain it. It involves the consolidation of the emerging politico-military system in South Vietnam to the degree necessary to absorb future inputs of American resources without further American management, but with sufficient efficiency to maintain a favorable balance of forces against the Communists.

Obviously the successful implementation of either of these mutually exclusive courses of action -- negotiations and Vietnamization -- requires some lead time. A rational choice between the two options must be based on an estimate of their relative chances of success. Regardless of American wishes and intentions, the odds are very low that the conflict will be terminated in the foreseeable future through negotiations. The goals of the Lao Dong Party and the government of South Vietnam are not reconcilable at this time.

The Communists are the beneficiaries of a major asymmetry in the character of the war. They have strong reasons to believe that the survival of the regime in North Vietnam is currently not threatened. The risks they incur are limited to losses of manpower and delayed economic development. It is therefore in their interest to continue to fight, albeit perhaps at the reduced intensity of protracted war, in the hope that favorable circumstances will make it possible to destroy their enemies in the future and establish a Communist regime in South Vietnam. But a political settlement on terms acceptable to the GVN would imply surfacing and exposing to destruction a substantial part of the armed forces and political cadres controlled by the Lao Dong Party. For this reason the Communists can only regard negotiations under present circumstances as a political form of warfare.

The Saigon leaders, in turn, cannot accept a coalition government without risking eventual annihilation. It is hard to conceive that a new GVN, acceptable to the Lao Dong Party, would also be able to count on substantial American military assistance over an extended period of time. But without such assistance RVNAF would soon disintegrate and the military balance of forces would shift decisively in favor of the Communists,

who would retain a substantial offensive capability in the North Vietnamese sanctuary, armed and supported by the Soviet Union and by Communist China. Furthermore, without massive economic aid a coalition government would be unable to cope with South Vietnam's formidable economic problems. The resulting explosive social tensions would facilitate Communist political subversion.

Compared with the chances of satisfactory war termination through negotiations, the odds are much more favorable that Vietnamization will make the completion of American disengagement possible in a period of about two years, under conditions that would maximize the chances that a viable non-Communist regime will endure in South Vietnam. Although an element of uncertainty is bound to persist for the indefinite future, because of the complex and essentially unpredictable nature of future relationships between U.S., GVN, and Lao Dong actions, it is possible to identify U.S. and GVN policies that would reduce the risk of failure.

The GVN can afford, under wartime conditions, to pursue authoritarian policies in its dealings with members of the articulate and vociferous urban political elites who, with few exceptions, lack genuine popular support and are unwilling to make sacrifices for the common good. In fact, authoritarian policies might be indispensable in order to carry out, without obstruction by the elites, reforms benefiting the masses. But in order to be able to face the challenge of Vietnamization, the GVN must pursue a correct rural strategy and gradually increase its popular acceptance by demonstrating that, unlike the Communists, it is able and willing to offer tangible, immediate benefits to the masses.

It must also follow a policy of military "sufficiency," so as to minimize the risk that the American people would eventually reject the burden of long-term assistance to RVNAF. The GVN should aim at maintaining at all times a favorable military balance of forces while accepting the fact that Communist violence will continue and that it cannot secure total control of the territory in the short run for a politically and economically reasonable price.

For its part, the United States must cease exerting pressure on the GVN to conform to abstract standards of Western democracy, which even the most advanced political systems do not follow in periods when their survival is threatened. In the next two years the potential for survival

of the GVN will be severely tested. This is not the time to introduce alien "rules of the game" in a country that has experienced thirty years of incessant turmoil and has no past direct experience with democracy. To help the GVN in its forbidding task, the United States should provide not only the military resources that are the obvious object of Vietnamization but also a correspondingly adequate level of economic aid, without which the GVN will unavoidably become paralyzed.

Vietnamization requires that economic aid to the GVN be regarded as an integral part of the war effort. The operational principles of conventional foreign aid administration should never have been applied to South Vietnam, especially after the United States assumed major combat responsibilities in that country. If the United States had spent much more than \$4 billion in economic aid to South Vietnam in the past eighteen years, it could have probably spent much less than \$100 billion in fighting the war and saved some of the 50,000 American soldiers whose deaths were, of course, a direct function of the length and scale of American military operations.

The amount of American resources spent at present for the military defeat of the Lao Dong Party is at least fifteen times as large as the amount of American resources devoted to the economic consolidation of the GVN/RVNAF. Because of the division of responsibilities currently prevailing within the U.S. government, it is much more difficult to secure adequate amounts of economic aid than it is to provide the much larger sums directly devoted to military operations. There is no rational basis for this, either in terms of national interest or from the individual viewpoint of American taxpayers. Both types of expenditures have the same purpose, namely the achievement of our objectives in South Vietnam, and should be viewed as fungible.

Additional economic aid to South Vietnam should not follow conventional patterns. As part of the Vietnamization process and replacing the nearly completed building program for the vast logistic infrastructure initiated in 1965, it should be possible to construct on a large scale homes for RVNAF personnel and their dependents and many other facilities that would guarantee them a better future and increase their stake in the country and their personal commitment to the defense of the GVN against the Lao

Dong. Seen in this perspective, expenditures for such a program are as directly relevant to our military policy in South Vietnam as the transfer of weapons to RVNAF, although a substantial input of additional economic resources through military channels would also contribute significantly to the alleviation of the economic crisis threatening the political stability of the GVN.

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INTRODUCTION: THE CONFLICTING REQUIREMENTS OF
NEGOTIATION AND VIETNAMIZATION

NEGOTIATIONS and Vietnamization cannot be pursued simultaneously, with equal chances of success. In order to maximize the chances that the end result of negotiations would be a viable non-Communist regime in South Vietnam, conditions would have to prevail in that country very different from those required for a successful policy of Vietnamization. A negotiated settlement implies open future competition in South Vietnam between the Lao Dong Party and other political groups. To maximize the chances of the success of these groups against the Lao Dong Party would require a liberal policy with regard to the expression of political opinion, the pursuit of political activities, and the natural selection of leaders.

But the success of Vietnamization may require very different conditions. Being a policy of continued armed resistance against Communist violence, it might be handicapped if the authority of the government of South Vietnam were weakened by a competitive, pluralistic political process.

It is the judgment of the author -- and a question like this must remain a matter of judgment in the last analysis -- that regardless of American wishes and intentions, negotiations cannot lead to a settlement acceptable to both Vietnamese parties in the conflict because the goals of the Lao Dong Party and those of the government of South Vietnam are not reconcilable at this time. Neither side can trust either its enemy's good faith or its own capability in a political contest. Both sides risk being exposed by free elections as political minorities without wide popular support, and both sides are vulnerable to foul play. Besides, neither side is willing to share power with the other, nor can one visualize a reasonable division of power between these two mortal enemies.

It is natural for the United States to want to establish some kind of truce between the two Vietnamese camps and bring about a peace based on a negotiated compromise. But the Vietnamese antagonists have made it abundantly clear that they are not seeking a compromise. While both have found it expedient to proclaim their willingness to negotiate, neither has made any real effort to create conditions conducive to a compromise. President Thieu has stated repeatedly that his government not only rejects completely the idea of a coalition government with the Communists but will not even accept the Lao Dong Party as a legal political entity in South Vietnam.

The Communists in turn have made it equally clear that they will not negotiate with the present leaders of the GVN -- Thieu, Ky, and Khiem -- and will only accept a coalition government that stands -- in their estimation -- for "peace, independence, neutrality and democracy." By thus claiming a right of veto over the composition of the provisional coalition government that they demand, which is supposed to work out a political settlement of the conflict, the Communists are actually rejecting accommodation with the other side while pretending that they are interested in negotiations.

The inner logic of the situation makes it understandable that no real negotiations have taken place in the twenty-eight months since the U.S. suspended the bombing of all North Vietnam and accepted the Viet Cong as one of four parties to the negotiations. After obtaining the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam, which was of course a major achievement for the Hanoi government, there was from the point of view of the Communists nothing substantive left to negotiate until the United States was ready to make another major concession.

Perfectly consistent with their interests, the Communists are now demanding the total withdrawal of United States forces and the formation of a coalition government acceptable to them. Translated into words that do not attempt to mask the true meaning of these requests, the Communist proposals imply the demand that the United States withdraw support from the Saigon regime.

Deprived of such support no interim coalition government could last for more than a very limited period. Eventually only a government that

has substantial external support from somewhere would be viable. In the absence of American support, only a government helped by the Communist great powers would be able to cope with the problems facing South Vietnam, at least in the short run.

Accepting the Communist negotiating conditions is therefore equivalent merely to postponing defeat. But the Communists in turn have no reason to negotiate on the terms offered by President Thieu, as that would amount to a formal abandonment of their struggle for power in the South.

It was therefore not surprising to hear the Secretary of State, Mr. William P. Rogers, tell a press conference on October 9, 1970, immediately after President Nixon's latest peace initiative:

The fact of the matter is that we have never had ever since the negotiations started in Paris any negotiations in the real sense of the word. We have never exchanged ideas. We have exchanged points of view, speeches, but never had an honest exchange of views about how to settle this conflict.

The President's peace initiative provides such a foundation. And, if the other side is interested in peace, we are satisfied that we could find a peaceful settlement that would be fair to all concerned.

On October 22, 1970, the two Communist delegations to the Paris talks rejected "definitively" the October 7 American proposals, after two weeks of vituperative denunciations of President Nixon's initiative. Is this their negotiating technique? Or is it perhaps that the Communists do not believe in the possibility of "a peaceful settlement that would be fair to all concerned"? Or have they concluded that "an honest exchange of views" is detrimental to their interests? Or do they view their intransigence as a useful weapon of political warfare? These are not easily answerable questions.

One relatively simple explanation is that as long as the Lao Dong Party leaders are secure in their control of North Vietnam, risking at worst a resumption of American bombings but not a military invasion aimed at the destruction of their regime, they simply have no reason to make concessions. If they did, they might lose support from their Chinese and Russian sponsors and risk erosion of the morale of their own political

and military combat forces. Furthermore, the Paris talks give them a propaganda platform and an opportunity to appear righteous without surrendering their revolutionary militancy and without creating the impression that they are willing to discuss compromises that are not compatible with their objectives.

Because the odds seem so low at this time that fruitful negotiations will take place in the foreseeable future, it may be useful to explore more fully the alternative road to American disengagement. Vietnamization, which is the transfer of American combat responsibilities to the South Vietnamese Armed Forces (RVNAF), requires more than making military hardware available and training South Vietnamese personnel to use and maintain it.

Vietnamization involves the consolidation of the emerging politico-military system in South Vietnam to the degree necessary to absorb future inputs of American resources without direct American management but with enough efficiency to maintain a favorable balance of forces against the Communists.

Many students of Vietnamese affairs -- "hawks" and "doves" alike -- believe that Vietnamization cannot succeed. Of course, it is not possible to assert the contrary with certainty or even to offer very high odds in favor of the thesis that Vietnamization will lead to a viable and durable non-Communist South Vietnam. An element of uncertainty is bound to persist in the indefinite future. The outcome of the struggle will depend on the complex and essentially unpredictable future relationship between U.S., GVN, and Lao Dong actions. The purpose of this study is to explicate some of the less obvious factors on which the success of this policy will depend.

PART I: ON NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations Would Require Political Liberalization

VIETNAMIZATION and a protracted military conflict require an authoritarian regime, based on the armed forces and on "civic action" relations with the masses. In contrast, diplomatic negotiations for a settlement through self-determination necessitate a liberalization of the regime and cooperation with the urban, politically active civilian elites. Unless they can generate organizational strength for a future competition with the deeply entrenched Communist infrastructure numbering over 70,000 professional political cadres inured to mass action, there is little hope that any of the badly divided non-Communist groups could win a majority or even a plurality in fair elections.

The electoral prospects of non-Communist groups are very difficult to assess. Any forecast would involve a long jump into the unknown. No elections in which all groups were free to participate on equal terms have ever been held in Vietnam. The past record of Vietnamese politicians is not promising, and a belief in political miracles is not a sound basis for forecasting. True, the history of other countries provides occasional examples of major qualitative changes in the mentality of a nation. But in the few instances when this happened, a charismatic leader appeared on the scene and suddenly changed the spirit of the nation.

In South Vietnam no such personality is in sight nor is likely to appear suddenly in the near future, under current restrictions on political activities. Many potential Vietnamese leaders have been destroyed physically or morally by the cruel events of earlier decades. Furthermore, the nature of the present regime and the threats it has to cope with preclude a leisurely process of natural selection of leaders. For

better or worse, the South Vietnamese would probably have to enter into political competition with the Communists with the leaders they now have.

The United States cannot tamper with the "rules of the game" developed by the present regime without risking the loss of both acceptable options: settlement by negotiation, and gradual disengagement through Vietnamization. To encourage a rapid process of natural selection of leaders, we would have to adopt a posture of political neutrality toward the Thieu government without any guarantee that a succession crisis would produce something better or that negotiations would lead to an acceptable agreement on self-determination. If negotiations fail, the instability engendered by free political competition would set back the timetable for Vietnamization and either extend the length of our commitment or force us to leave in defeat.

These deductive speculations concerning the respective merits of Vietnamization and negotiations are reinforced by the lessons drawn from Vietnam's sad political history since the turn of the century. All students of Vietnamese politics in the twentieth century are in agreement, despite variations in their interpretation, that no political movement in Vietnam, with the exception of the Communist Party led from the beginning by Ho Chi Minh, has been capable of mobilizing broad popular support and of absorbing and uniting the multitude of small groups with similar nationalist outlooks. The interested reader is referred to the brief political history of Vietnam offered as an appendix to this essay.

Vietnamese Politics Since the Beginning of the Paris Talks

It can be argued that the Tet offensive of 1968 acted as a catalyst on the Vietnamese military and that their performance has improved ever since. The beginning of peace talks with the Communists a few months later should have had a similar effect on the political elites, as it was obvious that only their dedication and energy could preserve a non-Communist South Vietnam if an agreement was reached on a political settlement of the conflict. In actuality, the factionalism of South Vietnamese politics continued to manifest itself, despite the possibility of an

eventual electoral confrontation with the Communists. Similar to the situation in 1954, when no effort was made to create a genuine nationalist movement in order to present a united front against the Communists in case elections had to be held under the Geneva agreements, the anti-Communist forces in South Vietnam have again failed to close ranks although they have had ample time to do so since the Tet offensive of 1968 and the beginning of the Paris peace talks.

The author has explored in depth with some of the most knowledgeable members of the Vietnamese political elite the dynamics and the natural history of the various alignments that were supposed to create national solidarity in 1968 and the maneuvers that took place in the first half of 1969 toward the creation of a united front of nationalist political parties. None of these efforts produced more than imaginary organizations, in the name of which some of the more prominent politicians of the moment negotiated, bargained, and issued statements. Already, these organizations are only remembered by students of newspaper clippings and diplomatic dispatches, and their creators moved on, to form other equally fictitious organizations. But the Vietnamese politicians were playing a good game. One could spend long and fascinating hours listening to accounts regarding the creation in March 1968 of the National Salvation Front and of a rival organization, formed a few days later, the Free Democratic Force. In June of that year, these two organizations, jointly with the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, created in turn the National Alliance for Social Revolution (Lien Minh). Each of these organizations had behind it a kaleidoscopic alignment of factions from various parties, sects, and professional organizations, but none of them gave any evidence of having popular support or even a reliable contingent of political cadres.

Furthermore, a study of the working of the National Assembly reveals conclusively that the Vietnamese game of politics has not been visibly improved by the constitutional system established in response to a variety of domestic and external pressures. In September 1966 a Constituent Assembly had been elected and a constitution had been drafted and approved, in March 1967, by the Armed Forces Council, consisting of forty generals on active duty who were at that time the ultimate holders of power. Implementing their commitment to constitutionalism, the generals

then had their chairman, General Thieu, elected President in September. With him an Upper House of 60 Senators was elected, followed by the election of a Lower House of 137 Assemblymen in October.

Some American observers had great expectations that these elected "representatives of the people" would mark a new departure in the political life of the country. Two years later it was apparent that these expectations had not been fulfilled. Austerity, fiscal legislation, land reform, and the regulation of political parties, to name only a few crucial issues, were adopted grudgingly, after endless dilatory legislative tactics and bitter attacks on the cabinet. Vocal defense of the privileges, perquisites, and immunities of the members of the Assembly became their major concern, although they had not obtained these rights as the result of personal struggle and sacrifice.

President Thieu was elected in September 1967 with 34.8 percent of the votes cast in an election contested by eleven candidates, who drew an 83 percent turnout of registered voters. As a minority President, in reality depending more on the support of the United States and of RVNAF than on the Vietnamese people, he was aware from the beginning of his tenure of the need for backing by a Vietnamese political party with mass appeal. But he was also aware of the factionalism that had always plagued Vietnamese political parties and of their poor performance in the last elections.

The experience of Ngo Dinh Diem and of the Can Lao Party led Thieu to conclude that although he would have to create a new political party he should proceed cautiously and avoid giving the impression that what he was interested in was a personal political instrument. Thieu was probably also aware of the fact that, lacking both charisma and organizational talent, like Diem before him, he might end up with a new version of the Can Lao, some new elitist organization, supporting him in exchange for special favors and privileges, but useless in a genuine competition with the Communists for popular support.

Despite the eye-opening experience of 1968 with various solidarity fronts, the following year Thieu again took the initiative to create another political front. In a major address delivered on April 7, 1969,

to a joint session of the National Assembly, in which he presented a six-point peace plan, including a cautious offer of electoral participation to the Communists, Thieu stated that Vietnam had lacked in the past political parties endowed with good leadership and organization and that this explained the parties' "constant passiveness and disadvantage in the anti-Communist fight." He had therefore decided "with great political courage" to create "a broad political group, which might be called a mass organization or a front, . . . a national political gathering in order to insure a South free from Communist influence and domination." He then invited those who disagreed with him, but shared the common nationalist opposition to Communism, to organize a united opposition.

A few days later Thieu started consultations with various political organizations, including the Lien Minh, created in 1968; some factions of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects; the Revolutionary Dai Viets; parts of the VNQDD; the Greater Solidarity Force representing Northern Catholics; the Citizens Bloc, representing Southern Catholics; the moderate Buddhists of the Quoc Tu faction; representatives of various ethnic minorities; and those members of the old Can Lao Party who had formed a new organization in April 1968, the Viet Nam Nhan Xa Cach Mang Dang (Vietnam Humanist Social Revolutionary Party).

Thieu's admonition, that the new organization concentrate on the 1970 and 1971 elections and become truly representative of the people before its leaders claimed cabinet posts and patronage, was lost in the instant clamor for positions and funds by those who expressed willingness to join.

Meanwhile, other groups, including the Tan Dai Viets, some VNQDD, some supporters of the An Quang Buddhist faction, prominent retired generals Duong Van Minh and Tran Van Don, the Progressive Nationalist Movement, established after Thieu's April 7 address by two professors of the National Institute of Administration, and some Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Southern Catholics, started maneuvers to create the unified opposition that Thieu had also suggested.

On May 25, 1969, Thieu made his first major public appearance as a potential party leader, urging the elites again to undertake jointly the political mobilization that they had previously failed to achieve

in the struggle against Communism. He then announced the creation of the National Social Democratic Front (NSDF), which was to consist only of those parties that were recognized as legitimate under a bill that had been passed with considerable delay by the National Assembly and was about to be promulgated. (It was, on June 19, and it stipulated the conditions that a party had to meet to be officially recognized, namely enough members and regional chapters to give it national significance. Under the new law, a majority of the 47 parties already registered with the Ministry of Interior and the approximately 80 unregistered but tolerated parties were bound to go out of existence.)

Thieu left it to the party leaders who had joined the National Social Democratic Front to agree on an organizational structure and to work out the specific relationship between their parties at central, provincial, and local levels. By July 11, 1969, when President Thieu, in the spirit of President Nixon's May 14 proposals, offered his own comprehensive plan for a political settlement in South Vietnam, neither the leaders of the NSDF nor those involved in creating a unified nationalist opposition had made much progress. Instead of getting ready for a political confrontation with the Communists, the politicians raised vocal opposition to the proposal for internationally supervised elections, in contrast with President Nixon's immediate endorsement of Thieu's six points as "comprehensive, statesmanlike, and eminently fair."

The GVN's Renewed Political Reliance on RVNAF

The appointment on August 23, 1969, of General Tran Thien Khiem to be the new Prime Minister of South Vietnam, in a cabinet in which no prominent party leaders were represented, marked a major -- and under the circumstances unavoidable -- change in political strategy.

American public figures who deplore Thieu's failure to "broaden the base" of his cabinet do not understand the realities of South Vietnamese politics. In hoping for a "political solution" to the war, they also fail to comprehend the logic of the Vietnamese situation. Without dedicated political elites, willing to sacrifice personal and group interests

and ambitions for the sake of national salvation, a political settlement based on free elections could result in chaos or in a Communist plurality against the badly divided non-Communist majority.

Having failed to consolidate the civilian nationalist political forces, Thieu and the other generals obviously decided to ignore the National Social Democratic Front and to govern with the support of RVNAF. The appointment of General Khiem, which many American observers deplored because he took the place of a civilian politician, marked this change in political strategy and brought to an end the period of experimentation with civilian political institutions that began in 1966 with the drafting of the new constitution and the attempt of the military to cooperate with the urban elites.

The new strategy includes an attempt to create a partnership between the military and the rural masses. If this policy succeeds it will also create a more solid base for Vietnamization than could be provided under present circumstances by a civilian government that reflects the narrow and divisive interests of the urban elites and is incapable of securing popular support.

The land reform act of March 26, 1970, has been the most conspicuous component of this rural strategy, but the elitist character of the RVNAF officer corps still seems influential, and the implementation of the new law is very slow and half-hearted. Similarly, another major component of the rural strategy, namely the devolution of powers from province and district chiefs, who are all appointed military men, to the elected village authorities, has been nullified in practice despite formal decrees ordering it, because of the opposition of senior military commanders. President Thieu may still be able to bring his rural strategy to life by slow but firm incremental steps, which would raise his stature as a national leader rather than a mere RVNAF representative.

It can be argued that under present Vietnamese conditions, which are a compound of all the normal ailments afflicting the pre-industrial societies of the Third World vastly magnified by thirty years of violent strife, only an authoritarian government can undertake reforms.

If the political process were truly responsive to the wishes of elected "representatives" drawn from the elites, the result would be

stagnation and immobility. Conflicting views and interests would check and stalemate each other and no reforms from above would be possible. The recent history of the Thieu regime's efforts to obtain economic emergency powers from the elected National Assembly is a convincing illustration of this point. Despite a politically and economically dangerous increase in the rate of inflation in 1970 and the close relationship between a firm GVN policy and American economic aid, precious months were lost before new import rates for the piastre were finally approved on September 29, 1970. In a country with a well-developed civic culture, such measures would have been adopted unanimously and without delay in wartime, however harmful they might have been to certain vested interests in competition with the national interest.

Seen from the point of view of American objectives, the second phase of the Thieu regime, beginning with the appointment of General Khiem as Prime Minister in August 1969, is preferable to a "broadly based" cabinet, in view of these realities of Vietnamese politics. A truly "broadly based" or "representative" government is not possible in South Vietnam today. It is a fiction, which can only perpetuate chaos and retard the Vietnamization program that will permit American disengagement. Furthermore, many observers agree that despite all its weaknesses, the Khiem cabinet is by far the best management team that has governed South Vietnam since it became an independent state in 1954.

In the absence of a political tradition and the experience that advanced countries accumulate over long periods of time by trial and error (which does not seem transferable through political textbooks or manuals), the present GVN/RVNAF system is the only one likely to govern efficiently enough to give Vietnamization a chance, create a self-defense capability, and liberate the United States of the necessity to indefinitely provide combat forces for the defense of South Vietnam.

It should be clear by now that because of the nature of Vietnamese politics, Vietnamization is preferable to negotiations unless the prospects for the political reconstruction of South Vietnam suddenly improve considerably, beyond what can be realistically expected at present.

If we understand at last, after 25 years of experience as a global superpower, that American intervention is no substitute for historical

evolution, then we should either abstain from interfering in the medieval domestic politics of Third World countries or should accept living with their unsavory characteristics when our real security interests are at stake. In the case of South Vietnam, far from deploring the fact that a strong GVN is emerging at last from the chaos that prompted our massive intervention in 1965, we should be glad that this development is now making Vietnamization a realistic option, and we should devise policies that increase the odds that this process can be brought to an early and successful conclusion.

Negotiations and Vietnamization As Seen From Hanoi

The material impact of Vietnamization on the South Vietnamese armed forces, on the economic and social system of that country, and especially on the political expectations and actions of various organized groups, friend and foe, is still difficult to assess and is the subject of serious controversy among well-informed and objective observers. The transfer of modern equipment from American to Vietnamese hands, the training of large numbers of military leaders and specialists, and especially the knowledge that soon the RVNAF will have to stand alone in defense of the present political system and its beneficiaries, is bound to have complex direct and indirect effects on all aspects of life in South Vietnam.

Besides its impact on internal developments in that country, Vietnamization is also bound to affect profoundly the plans of the North Vietnamese government, which is continuously engaged in an effort to understand the intentions of the United States. How does it assess our declaratory policy, our actions, and the impact of our words and deeds on the Saigon government, on the South Vietnamese armed forces, and on the various political forces in the South? Hanoi's future strategy depends on whether it sees Vietnamization as an effort to reduce the cost of the war to a politically acceptable level that would make it possible to keep American troops in Vietnam for a long time, or as a first step toward complete disengagement from Asia.

From Hanoi's point of view, U.S. policy statements on Vietnamization are likely to seem ambiguous and probably appear calculated to becloud

American intentions. Nevertheless it is the author's opinion that as political analysts in Hanoi review the major thrust of President Nixon's Asian policy, they conclude that the U.S. policy of Vietnamization -- if the United States continues it -- will deny them their principal objectives, *regardless of what stance they assume in negotiations*. Captured enemy documents show that Communist cadres view Vietnamization as a means by which the United States hopes to reduce the cost of the war while maintaining a large American presence in South Vietnam. While this does not necessarily reflect what the top Lao Dong leaders really think, they almost certainly regard Vietnamization as a way of continuing the containment of Communism by means other than direct, armed, American intervention.

A U.S. policy of gradual replacement of American by Vietnamese combat forces coupled with the refusal to help the Communists gain a foothold in the Saigon government might have been anticipated by the Lao Dong leaders once Mr. Nixon had won the November 1968 elections. They must have been aware that in defining his position, in a radio address on October 27, 1968, ten days before the elections, Mr. Nixon had dismissed some possible political solutions of the conflict that in his judgment offered "no solution at all."

Chief among these is the scheme to impose a coalition government on South Vietnam. Not only is this totally unacceptable to our South Vietnamese allies; it also would be an only thinly disguised surrender. . . .

Ruling out the imposition of a coalition government, however, does not rule out all participation in the political processes of South Vietnam by those who now may be in the National Liberation Front, provided they renounce the use of force and accept the verdict of elections.

Hanoi's analysts might have concluded that the new Administration would not be in any hurry to make concessions that would go against President Nixon's expressed views. The Lao Dong leaders could thus have reached the conclusion that the Paris talks would thereafter be useful to them only as a propaganda platform and as a partial safeguard against resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam. They could no longer hope to achieve their major objectives at the conference table.

The Communists had been expecting that growing opposition in the United States would terminate the war. Negotiations would then deal with

face-saving ways to help the U.S. government abandon its objectives, as had happened to the French in 1954 at Geneva. During the first months of the Nixon Administration, the Vietnamese Communists were probably still counting on the U.S. government to manipulate the political situation in South Vietnam so as to bring about the settlement demanded by them: replacement of the Thieu government by a bilaterally negotiated coalition.

At that time, Hanoi's hopes for a negotiated settlement might still have been more substantial because of various indications from Washington that the option of an imposed coalition in Saigon was not yet foreclosed. For instance, Secretary of State William P. Rogers had asserted as late as June 4, 1969, at a news conference, that the Nixon Administration was "not wedded to any government in Saigon." He also stated that both Washington and Saigon were prepared to accept Communist participation in a South Vietnamese government if based on electoral victories, and he suggested publicly the possibility of a commission representing both sides to supervise national elections.

Earlier, two days after the President's May 14, 1969 speech, Secretary Rogers hinted indirectly in Saigon that the United States would accept a coalition government if it were freely negotiated, or the result of elections, when he said that the United States' "single fixed objective" was to assure the people of South Vietnam the right to determine their own future without having it decided by force of arms and that the whole political process was open to negotiation. And, on May 18 and 21, Chalmers M. Roberts (whom Hanoi analysts may have considered well informed) reported in *The Washington Post* that the President's speech and Secretary Rogers' statements were "the tip of the iceberg" of the Nixon peace plan, which amounted to an attempt to convince both Vietnamese camps "to take a gamble on the outcome of the political process." Roberts wrote that "it is the sum total of the Nixon approach which clearly has upset Thieu and brought about his request for the Midway meeting. The burden now is on Thieu to come forward with his own peace plan, one to offset the [National Liberation] Front's 10-point program of May 8."

Hanoi's intelligence out of Saigon might have signalled in advance that President Thieu would insist, in his talks with President Nixon,

that the United States agree with the Saigon leaders on a timetable of withdrawal and give them the means to continue to fight alone rather than force them into a coalition with the Communists. This could have prompted the Lao Dong leaders to prepare to launch the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam immediately after the sharp turn in American policy at the June 1969 Midway conference, which was reflected in the paired major decisions: (1) to let President Thieu consolidate his regime, rather than force him to weaken it either by broadening its political base among non-Communist groups in South Vietnam or by negotiating a coalition with the Communists, and (2) to begin the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam and accelerate the equipping of RVNAF.

The Midway talks between President Nixon and President Thieu led to a lengthy joint communiqué, issued on June 8, 1969, which followed the May 8, 1969, ten-point program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam demanding a coalition government *prior to* elections, and the American counter-proposals of May 14, 1969, for elections supervised by an international body.

The Midway communiqué "rejected Communist attempts to predetermine the outcome of future elections before they are held," in other words, a coalition government established through negotiations prior to elections, but it also stated that the two Presidents "will respect any decision by the people of South Vietnam that is arrived at through free elections."

What, then, can one read into recent Communist offers to negotiate various issues *after* the U.S. promises to withdraw from South Vietnam at a specified date? Surely they would not commit themselves to abstain from further efforts to achieve control in South Vietnam, as this would be an obvious way to give the other side total victory. If one attempts to understand the inner logic of the Communist offer, the range of possible explanations is not very large. Do they try to maintain an image of Communist reasonableness because intransigence could have a negative impact on American and international public opinion? Do they see their moves as providing assistance to the peace movement in the United States, which could, on the basis of the Communist offer to negotiate, demand a more rapid withdrawal schedule? Or do they simply assume that constant

repetition of spurious offers to negotiate conditions American public opinion in favor of some "political settlement" that would work to their advantage, as in their previous experience with France in 1954?

Initiatives in the United States (such as the Senate Joint Resolution proposed on December 8, 1969, by Senators Charles McC. Mathias, Jr., and Mike Mansfield in "support of the President's efforts to achieve a political solution in Vietnam and of his plan for the accelerated withdrawal of all United States forces from South Vietnam") might have led the Lao Dong leaders to believe that a substantial segment of public opinion is only interested in a face-saving way out. This in turn may explain the enemy's persistent offer of the same formula, with minor variations, perhaps with the hope that the new wording might make the American people believe that it was the key to opening the door at last on a genuine settlement.

For instance, on February 26, 1970, the deputy chief of the Provisional Revolutionary Government delegation, Mr. Dinh Ba Thi, stated in Paris, repeating similar offers made formally or informally since September 1969:

If the U.S. Government agrees with the principles relating to the total withdrawal of American troops as well as with the formation of a provisional coalition government in South Vietnam, as pointed out in the 10-point overall solution, all concrete issues will be discussed and solved satisfactorily. If the U.S. Government announces the total withdrawal from South Vietnam of American troops, together with those of the other foreign countries in the U.S. camp, within 6 months without posing any conditions whatsoever, the parties will discuss immediately the timetable as well as the guarantee for the safety of such troop withdrawal.

In other words, in February 1970, August 1970 was offered as the outside limit for the withdrawal of all foreign forces assisting the GVN. In September 1970 the offer was repeated, but the date suggested was June 1971. This time the Communists added an offer to discuss the release of prisoners, besides the guarantee offered to the withdrawing forces. Because the early release of American prisoners had been built into a major issue by our side, the Communists obviously judged that it was to their advantage to link this issue with their previous proposals. It is fairly obvious that these proposals did not reflect Hanoi's basic

position but were tailored to the state of American public opinion as perceived by the Communists.

What the leaders in Hanoi actually thought can be surmised only from their actions and from an interpretation of their likely reactions to the moves of our side. It seems plausible that after the Midway communiqué the Communist leaders were initially sceptical about the chances of the policy of Vietnamization, both in terms of the capability of the GVN/RVNAF system to survive without the assistance of foreign troops and with regard to the American people's tolerance of slow and gradual disengagement from combat.

But their hopes on the second count may have been dispelled by the success of President Nixon's appeal for the support of "the great silent majority" on November 3, 1969. According to the Gallup Poll, support for the way the President handled the situation in Vietnam increased from 58 percent in October to 64 percent in November, while the percentage of those who disapproved dropped from 32 percent in October to 25 percent in November.

It may not have been mere coincidence that in December the North Vietnamese Defense Minister, General Vo Nguyen Giap, stated explicitly that it was necessary to revert to a strategy of protracted war. Hanoi may have then reached the conclusion that the odds were low that popular discontent might force the United States government to withdraw quickly from South Vietnam and that preparations had to be made for a lengthy conflict, although it is also possible that the sequence of the two events was fortuitous and that General Giap was only spelling out publicly a policy that had been decided much earlier in 1969, after the failure of the series of offensives which began at Tet 1968.

In any case, the events of the last year indicate that Hanoi has not been induced to negotiate but to prepare for a long and patient struggle for the achievement of its long-term objective, the reunification of Vietnam under the leadership of the Lao Dong Party.

Genuine Negotiations Are Not in the Lao Dong's Interest

There is a fundamental asymmetry between the situations of the two Vietnams. Our declaratory policy as well as our actions indicate that we do not intend to destroy the regime in North Vietnam. The Lao Dong Party and the Communist governments that protect and support it have made it equally clear that their objective is precisely the destruction of the regime in South Vietnam. We seek a much more limited "victory" than the other side, namely to prevent the Lao Dong Party from seizing power in the South by military conquest or by subversion. Or, viewed from another angle, we support a minority government friendly to us against another, hostile, minority that wants to displace it. Our objectives are further limited by the state of American public opinion, which makes it imperative that our purpose be accomplished without the continued employment of U.S. military forces and at much lower cost than that of the last five years.

Our objectives and the constraints under which they are pursued make the continuation of the conflict less risky for Hanoi than negotiating a settlement. As long as the Communist regime in the North is in no danger of being destroyed by direct military intervention, and as long as the material costs of the war it wages are carried by the Soviet Union and by China, Hanoi's most likely risks are manpower losses in the South and delays in its economic development plans. Actually, the Communists have already initiated a campaign of economic reconstruction, taking advantage of the twenty-eight quiet months since the total suspension of bombing in November 1968. Le Duan's policy guidelines, issued in February 1970, revealed that the development of the North would no longer be subordinated to the prosecution of the war in the South.

Obviously, the Lao Dong leaders are not unduly worried by future American intentions, although Hanoi must still consider the possible risk that the United States will resume continuous bombing of the North. President Nixon has repeatedly warned the leaders of North Vietnam that "they will be taking grave risks" should they attempt "to jeopardize the security of our remaining forces in Vietnam." But North Vietnam, having had the experience of four years of American bombing, has probably discounted

that risk in its present calculations. Both the damage it could suffer under various assumptions and the benefits it could expect from the political constraints that a resumption of the bombing would place on the Nixon Administration by increasing Congressional and public opinion pressures on it for getting out of Vietnam can be forecast. The Lao Dong leaders have probably concluded that on balance these risks are tolerable.

If this is the case, then "protracted war" gives the Lao Dong Party a better chance than negotiations to achieve its ultimate objective, namely the destruction of the anti-Communist, American-supported GVN and its eventual replacement by a Communist regime. After all, viewed realistically, negotiations would produce at best an "Italian solution": the legalization of the Communist party in South Vietnam, amnesty and legal protection for its members and, after elections, participation in public life as one segment of the "legitimate opposition," which the other political forces ("manipulated by the Americans") would obviously try to exclude permanently from participation in the executive branch of the government.

It has been argued above that, in view of the lack of cohesion of the other political forces, the Lao Dong could form a formidable bloc. Some observers believe that it could obtain 20-30 percent popular support, and that this could allow it to make deals with other groups and eventually build a winning coalition. In practice, the argument is spurious and the Communists are not going to fall for it. There is no known case in contemporary political history where the "rules of the game" have been considered sacrosanct when the survival of a regime was at stake. In a real struggle for its continued existence any regime resorts ultimately to force in self-defense.

The outcome of Communist political maneuvers in South Vietnam is therefore predictable. There is no parliamentary road to Communism. The Lao Dong Party has only four options available: (1) to conquer power by the forceful overthrow of the GVN; (2) to obtain power through an internationally sanctioned deal with the United States; (3) to abandon its plans for the unification of Vietnam under Communist leadership; (4) to shift to protracted war in the hope that changed circumstances will make it possible to achieve the old objectives at a later date.

It would obviously strain the credulity of much less tough-minded individuals than the leaders of the Lao Dong Party to rely on American and GVN commitments to give the Communists in South Vietnam a fair deal. Only saintly qualities could make the GVN accept the mortal enemies of yesterday as a political minority with equal rights, especially if the anti-Communist forces were to remain in full control of the state's means of coercion, while the Communists would eventually have to give up their weapons and rely on the word of their opponents or on international guarantees, which would lack, under foreseeable circumstances, substantial enforcement capabilities.

There is no way out of this latter dilemma for either side. Regardless of what ingenious schemes could be devised for an initial cease-fire period and for the holding of elections, the GVN, aiming at exercising its normal functions, would have to attempt to establish its control over all the armed forces, regular and irregular, remaining in the country, safeguard its monopoly of the means of coercion, exert all police powers necessary for the normal administration of government, collect taxes, and carry out public policies. Schemes concerning the division of South Vietnam have been discussed occasionally but without spelling out in full their operational implications. The regroupment of Communist and anti-Communist forces in two geographically distinct areas would repeat on a smaller scale the 1954 partition of Vietnam. Creation of a Communist regroupment zone contiguous to the 17th parallel would in fact shift the 1954 border from the DMZ to a line farther south.

Before the July 21, 1954 armistice, the Lao Dong Party had demanded, as a bargaining position, the division of Vietnam as far south as the 13th parallel, while the French insisted initially on a line as far north as the 18th parallel. The 17th parallel was a compromise.

It is conceivable that the line could be changed by international agreement, although it would appear, in historical perspective, to be a horrible proof of human cruelty and folly that such a relatively minor territorial adjustment should require almost two decades of enormous suffering by the Vietnamese people and extravagant American sacrifices in lives and resources.

If it were not contiguous to the 17th parallel, the division of South Vietnam would probably take the form of "leopard spots," Communist

enclaves within territories held by the anti-Communist forces. The size of such enclaves could vary according to the specific scheme adopted. Enclaves could be as small as districts, of which there are 256 in South Vietnam today, or as large as several provinces. In either case, Communist armed forces would have to be present in each enclave to enforce the administrative actions of the local Lao Dong government officials, who in turn would implement the policy decisions of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, acting in its own right or as a Southern front for the Lao Dong Politburo.

PRG civil and military officials would have to enjoy free transit rights through territories controlled by the anti-Communist authorities, who would naturally need the same privileges in Communist-held areas. The borders of the enclaves would have to be clearly defined, especially in densely populated areas, at least for purposes of taxation and law enforcement. Persons and goods would have to be able to move without excessive impediments if major economic disruptions were to be avoided.

A "leopard-spot" division of South Vietnam would force a medieval pattern of authority on a country that long ago ceased to consist of autarchic village communities capable of living isolated even from their proximate neighbors. There is no modern precedent on which to base predictions concerning the viability of such a formula. Sooner, rather than later, a new power center would have to emerge, smash through the barriers, destroy the new "feudalism," and unify the country. Such an initiative would probably have the support of a substantial portion of the population because the alternative would impose intolerable restrictions on the daily life of all people. The Communists do not now have the power to eliminate the GVN authorities from the countryside. In fact, they have lost control over most of the population and territory of South Vietnam. No realistic forecast should credit them with a significantly greater capability in the next few years. Therefore, the gradual elimination of Communist-controlled enclaves after a cease-fire appears more likely than the destruction of RVNAF and of the GVN authorities backed by them. It is most unlikely that the leaders of RVNAF/GVN would refrain from eliminating Communist enclaves whenever opportunities presented themselves.

The only guarantees available to the Communists would be: (1) their own defense potential in their enclaves; (2) a firm U.S. policy of restraints on the GVN; (3) effective international guarantees. None of these are likely to appear trustworthy to Communist policymakers.

Isolated enclaves would be much more difficult to protect than a mobile Communist strike force using guerrilla tactics and thus putting RVNAF on the defensive. Once the Communists accepted being confined to a number of limited areas, they would be placed in a defensive position, besieged for all practical purposes by an enemy that has superior mobility and firepower, has the Communist positions targeted, and can deny them access to military supplies, and even to provisions.

The Communists would have no reliable guarantee that the GVN would not resume hostilities at the most convenient time from its point of view. They would also hesitate to rely on U.S. self-restraint, as it is hardly plausible that a nation that has sacrificed so much to deny the Lao Dong Party control of South Vietnam would suddenly turn into its protector against "American puppets" (as the Communists invariably call the GVN authorities). Finally, international guarantees cannot be credible, whether they are extended by the powerless United Nations or by an *ad hoc* organization created and financed by governments that are not likely to be prepared to interpose substantial military forces between the two sides in the Vietnamese conflict.

If the Lao Dong leaders are most unlikely to accept a formal cessation of hostilities in exchange for a precarious partition of South Vietnam, it is even less plausible that they would accept exposing their combat forces and political infrastructure on a country-wide basis, without special protective sanctuaries, in order to participate in "democratic elections." The Communists cannot expect to obtain an absolute popular majority. Jointly or internationally supervised elections, however honest, would therefore not help them to achieve their goal. From the Communists' point of view, the demand that all American forces be withdrawn and the Thieu regime be abandoned by the United States makes eminent sense. As long as American forces are still in South Vietnam, a government repugnant to the United States has no chance of consolidating its power.

Why the GVN Cannot Accept a Coalition Government

From an American point of view, acceptance of Communist demands for a coalition government would only make sense if we decided to terminate all aid to the GVN and allow the disintegration of RVNAF. We would witness, in rapid succession, first the cessation of all military and pacification operations against the Communists and then the collapse of the government, which would want to pursue a policy of strict neutrality.

It is easy to explain why a coalition government would not last. No devilishly clever Communist schemes would be necessary to bring about its downfall. The present GVN/RVNAF system is entirely dependent on U.S. financial aid for military and economic purposes. Would Congress authorize aid in support of a Saigon government that included elements acceptable to the Lao Dong Party? How could massive aid be justified for a government that would not continue the resistance against Communist military or political efforts to gain control of South Vietnam?

Without substantial amounts of American aid, any South Vietnamese government that would try to make the present politico-military system operate would face, in the short run at least, an insurmountable task. The GVN/RVNAF structure would disintegrate within a short time. It depends financially today on revenue from imports of at least \$750 million, of which 60 percent comes from U.S. aid programs and the rest from dollars spent in South Vietnam by the U.S. Department of Defense and by American private contractors and individuals. Exports, which since World War II have never reached \$100 million a year, have gradually fallen to an annual level of only \$15 million.

The 1969 GVN budget of 142.8 billion piastres showed receipts directly dependent on the American involvement in Vietnam of 76.3 billion piastres, domestic tax receipts (other than custom duties) of 36.9 billion piastres, sale of treasury bills of 1.0 billion piastres, and deficit financing of 28.6 billion piastres. Ministry of Defense expenditures and defense-related civil programs amounted to 105.3 billion piastres, while all other civil programs took only 37.5 billion piastres.

These figures show that current domestic tax receipts and the sale of treasury bills are about adequate just to cover the normal civil

expenditures of the GVN. All expenditures related to the war are paid directly or indirectly by the United States or by deficit financing. Without the Communist challenge South Vietnam could survive with its present inefficient political system, which is only capable of mobilizing through taxation about 8 percent of GNP. Other underdeveloped, agrarian countries are not doing better. But no GVN can fight without external assistance an insurgency supported by North Vietnam and backed in turn by the resources of all the other Communist countries.

Therefore, if the establishment of a coalition government or even a "peace cabinet" resulted in the termination of American aid, RVNAF would have to be disbanded and the civilian (pacification) programs of the GVN would have to be cancelled. One can assume for argument's sake that the GVN, contrary to its past performance records, could handle the economic and social dislocations created by the demobilization of over one million men, through heroic efforts to return as many people as possible to agriculture while creating urban employment for those who acquired special skills during the war. But it is beyond possible dispute that without external assistance the GVN would be defenseless against a resumption of the insurgency.

The logic of the situation would therefore force such a coalition cabinet to grant more and more concessions to the Lao Dong Party. The eventual takeover would only be a matter of time. The insistent demand for a total and unconditional withdrawal of U.S. forces and for the replacement of the present Thieu administration with a coalition government is therefore perfectly logical from the Communist point of view and entirely incompatible with our stated objectives.

For the United States, acceptance of these demands would create a worse situation than total and immediate withdrawal without negotiations with Hanoi. If the United States decides to leave South Vietnam quickly, there is no reason why it should also overthrow the present GVN leaders. However small the survival chances of the GVN following a precipitate American disengagement, it is not absolutely inconceivable that the regime would survive. Other ways can be found for the United States to protect its withdrawing forces than by a deal with the enemy at the expense of its ally, and indeed in December 1970, President Nixon warned

that if the NVA forces "increase the level of fighting in South Vietnam" as American forces are withdrawn, he would retaliate by ordering the bombing of military targets in North Vietnam.

The demand that we replace the Thieu regime with a coalition government acceptable to the Vietcong cannot be viewed by the Lao Dong Party as a genuine negotiating point. It can probably be explained as follows: instead of simply refusing to negotiate, which would release us from the moral obligation to continue the Paris talks and to abstain from bombing North Vietnam, the enemy makes demands that seem superficially reasonable, although realistic thinking will easily expose them as meaningless: one may attempt the liquidation of an opponent, but one does not invite him to negotiate his own demise.

As long as the United States continues the Paris talks, Communist demands for a coalition government in Saigon are useful to them for political warfare purposes. The very fact that the United States meets weekly with the Communists and listens to their demand for the liquidation of the Saigon regime -- although it has never demanded in return the liquidation of the Hanoi regime as a matching condition prior to the establishment of a coalition government -- instills doubt in many South Vietnamese circles. They cannot be absolutely certain that the United States will not eventually accede to the Communist demand. Consequently, some elements among the South Vietnamese political elites must be prompted to "take out insurance" by covert cooperation with the Vietcong. Our acceptance of lengthy discussions concerning the possibility of a coalition government is bound to help the Lao Dong Party in its efforts to subvert the present South Vietnamese regime.

PART II: ON VIETNAMIZATION

Possible Destabilizing Effects

IN DECIDING to Vietnamize the war, the United States made implicitly or explicitly a major decision about the political future of South Vietnam. If the conflict were to be terminated through negotiations, the nationalist, anti-Communist forces in the South would have to prepare themselves for a political confrontation with the Communists. As Vietnamese political organizations have always been splintered in the past, with the sole exception of the Communist Party, a policy decision to negotiate a political settlement would have had to be based not only on the chances of arriving at a reasonable understanding with the Vietnamese Communists but also on realistic expectations regarding the capacity and willingness of various political groups to join forces and organize themselves. Otherwise national elections could give the Communists a chance to win a plurality victory against a field of weak and divided opponents.

The political situation in the South would have made it rather risky in 1969 to agree on a war termination formula based on free elections. Neither history nor recent developments gave cause for optimism with regard to the capacity of the non-Communist political forces to close ranks and subordinate personal and group interests to the cause of national salvation. If the Communists had accepted President Nixon's May 14, 1969 proposals for elections under international supervision, the badly divided anti-Communist forces might have lost these elections because of their lack of discipline, organization, and experience.

Whether the Communists ever seriously explored the implications of the May 14 proposals, and if they did not, why, is not clear. In the light of their past experience with negotiated settlements it is at least

plausible that they were afraid of such arrangements. Anyhow, the continued American emphasis on Vietnamization as an alternative American termination tactic has created an entirely different political situation in South Vietnam. There is less talk, of late, on how to broaden the base of the Thieu government and on how to rally to its support a large number of political groups in the name of national solidarity. The 1971 elections for the presidency, under the 1967 Constitution, which excludes the participation of Communists, do not raise as complex issues as would elections held as the result of a negotiated settlement. Although it now appears that President Thieu will be challenged in the October 1971 presidential election by General Duong Van Minh, who will have the support of Buddhists and other groups eager to see the war come to an early end, the odds are low that the GVN/RVNAF system would allow a course of events that would deprive South Vietnam of American assistance. The regime will probably survive General Minh's challenge or a splintering of votes as the result of multiple candidacies.

The major political issue for Hanoi (as well as for the U.S. government) raised by the policy of Vietnamization is whether it will have a stabilizing or destabilizing effect on the present regime and consequently whether it will assist or impede the Vietnamese armed forces' war effort, which requires firm leadership and purposeful action.

Vietnamization can affect the stability of the Saigon government by influencing the political attitudes and expectations and the economic interests of various elements of South Vietnamese society. Among the kinds of effects to be considered, four are of obvious importance:

1. The future attitudes of the more recent members of the expanded and increasingly professional officer and NCO corps toward their top leaders, toward each other, and toward the problems of their country;

2. The social consequences of mobilizing and thus withdrawing from productive economic activities and normal family life over one million men out of a total population of 17 million;

3. The economic impact of loss of revenue following the reduction of American military presence and of increased war expenditures by the Vietnamese government;

4. Popular and elite reactions toward a government that is inevitably repressive in trying to eradicate the Viet Cong infrastructure, and insecure enough in its hold on power to be tempted to silence its non-Communist opposition. These and other consequences of Vietnamization could generate pressures of critical intensity as the end stage of the Vietnamization

program is reached. By then, the Vietnamese officer corps should have become a much more self-confident group, the life of the country may have been thoroughly militarized, rapid inflation and other manifestations of a war economy will make it extremely difficult for the Saigon government to cope with constantly increasing war expenditures, and an atmosphere of growing restlessness and protest may force the government into becoming increasingly harsh. Of course, Hanoi will see the stability of South Vietnam as being vulnerable not only to the consequences of American policy decisions but also to the Lao Dong's own multi-faceted, continuous assaults on its institutions.

The question to be answered concretely, if the answer is to have any practical value, is how the Communists will try to counter and exploit the political vulnerabilities of Vietnamization to advance their long-term goals. The shift in the balance of military power against the Communists and the necessity to conserve resources (proclaimed already by Ho Chi Minh in May 1969) makes it unlikely that they will engage in the near future in massive attacks either on American or on Vietnamese forces. But even if such attacks were to take place, they would be unlikely to prove decisively successful as long as the American military presence remains substantial. One key question then is whether the NVA/VC forces could stage massive attacks after Vietnamization is completed and if so, whether RVNAF could repulse them without the help of foreign troops. Another equally important question is what the Communists would gain by staging massive attacks unless they could really expect to completely destroy the resistance of the GVN/RVNAF.

The Tet 1968 offensive was the high point of the strategy that aimed at the total destruction of the Saigon regime with one massive blow. Another Tet-type offensive, even if it resulted in the occupation of some towns, would lead to ruthless and persistent U.S. and/or RVNAF counterattacks, which would ultimately force the Communist troops to withdraw. Attacks on military installations and/or large troop units might cause substantial though temporary increases in American casualties but at a much greater cost in Communist lives.

But of course major offensives are not the only strategy available to the Communists. Other powerful methods at their disposal are protracted war and political subversion. Protracted war requires the continued availability of the North Vietnamese sanctuary as a source of supplies and as a training ground, some popular cooperation, extracted

by coercion and/or indoctrination, and a Lao Dong Party united and purposeful in providing political and strategic direction. As long as these factors are present, the harassment of American and Vietnamese forces will continue, perpetuating the image of an endless war. By reverting to guerrilla warfare, the Communists also deny the Saigon government uncontested authority over population and territory. Besides draining Saigon's resources and reducing its administrative efficiency, such protracted war operations, which are much less costly than major offensives, can evoke indefinitely the specter of an eventual Communist victory and thus block the release of the energy of South Vietnamese society for peaceful, productive pursuits.

Whether such an atmosphere facilitates Communist subversion is not easy to establish. The current and future success of political subversion depends on many factors not fully understood. Even if recent estimates are correct and the Lao Dong has been able to infiltrate 30,000 agents into the GVN/RVNAF system, it is not self-evident that these agents could achieve in the future what they had not been capable of doing in the past. It may well be that the GVN/RVNAF system has already developed defense mechanisms that reduce the effectiveness of covert enemy operations to an irritant that can neither be eliminated nor turned into lethal blows against the present power structure.

One must distinguish between the compliance of villagers with demands sanctioned by VC terror, and voluntary political cooperation based on secret persuasion by Communist propagandists. The latter is true subversion, which, if successful, could undermine the Vietnamese governmental apparatus and the armed forces, besides securing the only reliable form of popular support to the insurgents. Judging from the experience of the past, Communist subversion has never been very successful. The Vietnamese Communists seem to have remained a minority group, though much more important than other factions because of their superior organization and ruthlessness, which allowed them to eliminate opponents and to coerce the masses. How well they would do if they had to rely only on persuasion and how they would fare in open electoral competition has never been tested.

Will a repressive regime in Saigon significantly increase the opportunities for subversion available to the Communists in the future? Judging from the experience of the nine years of government by Ngo Dinh Diem, the answer appears to be negative. The experience of the Diem period does not suggest that the progressive alienation of many religious and ethnic groups created decisive opportunities for the VC. The protracted argument about the origins of the insurgency in the South after 1954 need not be rehearsed here. It is well established that trained cadres, either reinfiltrated from the North or left as sleepers in the South, were activated following a political decision of the Lao Dong Party in 1959-1960.

After it got started, the Communist insurgency never merged with the other, non-Communist opposition, represented by the religious sects repressed by Diem in 1954-1955; by the nationalist parties ignored and persecuted by the government; by various military elements, some of which had attempted coups against Diem; and by the Buddhists, whose political mobilization finally led to the downfall of the Diem regime. At best one can say that the anarchy following Diem's downfall favored the VC temporarily and that some isolated individuals joined the VC or "dropped out" and became "*attentistes*."

In July 1962, on the eighth anniversary of the Geneva agreements, the NLF invited "all parties, sects and groups, representing all political tendencies, social strata, religions, and nationalities in South Vietnam" to cooperate against Diem. The Communists had already decided in March of that year, at the first Congress of the NLF, to reserve 23 out of 55 seats on the Central Committee for personalities willing to rally.

Jean Lacouture claimed in 1965, in his book *Le Vietnam entre deux paix*, that the NLF had abstained from proclaiming a "provisional government," in order to maintain flexibility to broaden their political base. By the time they finally proclaimed a Provisional Revolutionary Government in June 1969, after the Nixon-Thieu Midway Conference, no major groups and only a handful of known public figures had joined the Communists.

Although the "civil war strength" of the Lao Dong will remain a major factor in South Vietnam for some time, it can be argued that the

appeal of Communism as an electoral force is limited to a fraction of the total population that may have remained fairly constant since 1945. Other South Vietnamese, even though they may become actively opposed to the present regime, form a separate opposition, distinct from and hostile to the Communists, albeit sharply divided within itself.

This means that instead of the customary division of the South Vietnamese political spectrum into a pro-Communist minority, a pro-government minority, and a majority indifferent to both sides in the civil strife, it may be more accurate to think of three active minorities competing for popular support. The third consists of a variety of political elements hostile to the Saigon government but unwilling to cooperate with Communists. Their aim is to replace the present Thieu government or to receive portfolios in it, but their own ideological and material interests would make partnership with the Communists and rejection of future American assistance unlikely, even if their present statements pay homage to national reconciliation or suggest a neutralist stance.

It is not at all obvious how the Communists could make a greater direct impact on various political groups or contribute more effectively to the rapid weakening of the Saigon government than they have in the past. After twenty-five years of civil strife the population at large is probably fairly immunized against romantic outburst of revolutionary élan. No political mass migration from one side to the other is likely as long as the Saigon regime does not disintegrate or a precipitate American withdrawal does not substantially increase the probability of an imminent Communist victory.

Only indirectly and in a relatively longer time frame could Vietnamization benefit the Communists. There is serious danger that in the absence of large numbers of American advisers the GVN/RVNAF would become politically more heavy-handed and inflict intolerable oppression on the population. It is also possible that the Saigon regime would be prematurely abandoned economically by the United States, thus creating domestic dislocations in South Vietnam too massive for efficient counteraction. Policy errors, by the Thieu government or its successors, comparable to the repression of the sects by Diem in 1954-1955 or the persecution of the Buddhists in 1963, are of course possible, but cannot be induced by the Communists.

Neither can they bring about a sharp cutback of military and economic aid to South Vietnam by the U.S. Congress, which would indeed paralyze the armed forces and the civil administration and could also hurt the population badly enough to mobilize them politically against the regime.

Short of such self-inflicted wounds, which could result in rapid and dramatic changes of the situation, sudden political upheavals are not likely. They are beyond the capacity of the Communists to generate. What the Communists can do is to wait for currently unavailable opportunities, which might appear as the unintended consequences of the Vietnamization policy or (to use Communist terminology) as the result of the "inner contradictions" of South Vietnamese society.

Naturally, this would not be a very dynamic, activist political strategy, but it would be fully compatible with several years of protracted war. It might also make it easier, paralleling the concern with conservation of military resources, to protect the Communist infrastructure against Phoenix and related programs by exposing it less than would be required if it were to pursue at this time an intensive campaign of political action.

These reflections suggest that it may be more useful to inquire how Vietnamization will affect Vietnamese society than to speculate on how the enemy could instigate upheavals. Furthermore, it may be easier to counter the latter than the undesirable results of the former. Considerable practical experience has been accumulated on how to deal with guerrilla operations and political subversion. But there have not been many other instances of high-pressure rapid militarization of an agrarian society, using external resources provided by a foreign advanced industrial society. Despite two decades of military assistance programs and much talk about nation-building and political development, we know little about the results of such massive, externally induced social change, especially when it creates a major new power structure. Compounding these uncertainties is the fact that our capacity to influence the course of events in South Vietnam is bound to decline as we withdraw. Judging from the impact left in various Third World countries by much more intensive Western influences, one should not expect lasting results from a few years of intensive exposure to American advisers. If the GVN/RVNAF

system that we helped to emerge has survival value, it will adjust, despite our wishes, to the present realities of the Vietnamese situation.

American Leverage After Vietnamization

While we carried the primary burden of defense in South Vietnam, our leverage should have been at its peak. The presence of more than half a million troops in-country and a widespread net of American advisers attached to Vietnamese civil and military authorities should have given maximum weight to American pressure on the South Vietnamese in all fields, as it did in the pacification program.

The massive presence of American combat troops guaranteed (and still does, of course) that a change of cabinet in Saigon would not result in total chaos and thus facilitate a Communist takeover. This should have made South Vietnamese governments apprehensive that their lack of performance, or non-compliance with American demands, could result in U.S. encouragement or acceptance of coups by more responsive political competitors. But the United States did not use this option to shape the socioeconomic policy of Saigon governments. With Vietnamization this option will be increasingly riskier and less likely to work, although we will of course retain leverage because of the GVN/RVNAF's reliance on American aid.

The presence of American advisers throughout the South Vietnamese administrative and defense apparatus made it possible to apply leverage at lower governmental echelons, wherever specific policies were carried out. American advisers could deny Vietnamese military commanders the support of American firepower and mobility. They could also restrict or delay the distribution of American economic aid to province and district chiefs. This form of pressure was widely used and apparently helped improve the quality of Vietnamese civil and military operations.

It can be argued that between 1965 and 1969 the United States had available both "massive retaliation," in the form of the threat that it could replace unsatisfactory cabinets, and "graduated response," to secure implementation of policies by the lower echelons of the Vietnamese bureaucracy. Had we been genuinely concerned with issues such as broadening the political base of the government, establishing respect for the

rule of law, implementing policies of social justice, etc., the time to attempt to do so would have been during those years when we had maximum leverage. This was also the time to exert pressure for a political settlement with the Vietnamese Communists and to stand ready to guarantee its enforcement, had we then been interested in such a compromise.

The decision to Vietnamize is likely to reduce our leverage drastically, although the transfer of material resources to the Vietnamese government will have to be increased in coming years.

We cannot hope to Vietnamize the war successfully without political stability in Saigon. This means that we cannot threaten the Thieu government with the "massive retaliation" of coups. We will have to accept the present government's policies, as long as it does not default on its commitment to secure military self-reliance and to help us release American forces from combat duty.

As Vietnamization advances to its second stage and Saigon's dependence on U.S. firepower and mobility decreases, we will also lose much of the "graduated response" form of leverage exerted by American advisers on their Vietnamese counterparts.

If the whole program is successfully completed -- at a projected cost of about \$6 billion (according to Secretary Laird's estimate given to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on November 19, 1969) -- we will have relatively little direct influence on the military operations of the Vietnamese armed forces and on their policies toward the population of their country.

The United States will not even be able to threaten denial of the flow of military supplies required by the Vietnamese armed forces in order to deter or terminate undesirable policies. It would be hard to conceive situations that would prompt the United States to adopt policies that would increase the vulnerability of South Vietnam to Communist military and political pressures.

It is also not likely that the use of U.S. economic aid as an instrument of political influence can be used in the future more effectively than in the past. According to the 1969 Annual Report of USAID/VN, in the 18 years since 1951 about \$4 billion was spent or committed in Vietnam. The funds were used primarily to defend the status quo, reflecting

the interests of a pro-Western oligarchy, although it could also be argued that without the leverage that aid gave the United States, the present institutional arrangements, including the 1967 Constitution, several elections, the beginnings of an independent judiciary, a concern for legality, etc., would not have materialized.

Now that our major concern is to maximize the chances of survival of the regime established by our massive intervention, in order to facilitate an American military disengagement, it is not credible -- and the Thieu government cannot fail to be aware of this -- that we would use, in a destabilizing way, the denial of economic aid on which the stability of that regime will continue to depend. The time for major, American-sponsored reforms is past. The logic of Vietnamization will reduce the flexibility of our relations with the Saigon government. To secure its performance in fighting Communism, the United States will have to accept the kind of regime created by the incumbents. Vietnamization involves therefore not only transfer of military responsibilities but abstention from future interference in the composition of the cabinet and the administration of the country. Vice President Agnew's statement in Guam on December 28, 1969, that the United States would exert no pressure on the Thieu regime to "broaden its base," was clearly in accordance with the realities of the situation. The United States cannot expect to obtain, while disengaging, what it failed to secure at the peak of its efforts on behalf of South Vietnam.

The Thieu government may have a more narrow political base than some Americans consider desirable. Some Vietnamese officials may lack qualifications according to our standards. But to be able to hold, first with a dwindling American presence, and eventually alone, against the Communists, President Thieu has to have *his* team. The United States will have to accept the situation as a calculated risk: we will have to make vast resources available without getting much policy or operational control in return. If we continue to maintain a large body of advisers managing and supervising every aspect of South Vietnamese public policy from political and military grand strategy down, we also retain implicitly a residual obligation to resume combat operations if the South Vietnamese fail to hold their own against their Communist enemies. Although this

aspect of Vietnamization has not been discussed, at least publicly, our disengagement will have to include phasing out American advisers, however useful they may have been in the past in signalling to the GVN through the U.S. Mission the worst errors and abuses of the Vietnamese civilian and military bureaucracies.

South Vietnamese Morale During the Transition Period

It is frequently argued that the United States should announce a firm timetable for the withdrawal of American forces, as this would force South Vietnam to work out a settlement or assume full responsibility for its future fate. It is open to question whether the peace of mind that some Americans would gain from such an announcement would be a fair trade-off for the problems this would create in South Vietnam and the benefits it would provide to the planners in Hanoi.

Uncertainty is uncomfortable but can be of great value in complex and delicate political and military maneuvers. In the context of Vietnamization, the most difficult question may have been how to make our withdrawal from South Vietnam appear an inexorable decision in order to shock the South Vietnamese elites into action, while performing the operation at a rate that would avoid either paralysis or the stampede to the enemy side that could result from a panic reaction.

The GVN seems to have handled this problem well. For instance, in a major press conference, held in the presence of his whole cabinet on January 9, 1970, President Thieu -- as reported by Terence Smith in *The New York Times* -- stated that it would be "impossible and impractical" for all American combat troops to be withdrawn from South Vietnam in 1970:

We need time for training and we need equipment from the United States. I never believed that all the (combat) troops would be withdrawn in 1970. . . . It will take many years. . . .

President Thieu also told the press that day that he was making up a list to submit to the American government "not only of military equipment but also of funds and most particularly the material help to improve the living conditions of Vietnamese soldiers and their families," a theme that he has repeated throughout 1970.

Avoiding a public discussion about the timetable of Vietnamization may have helped President Thieu prevent panic in Saigon. In fact, statements such as the one quoted above meant little more than that *some* American combat troops will still be in South Vietnam after 1970 -- which was hardly a startling disclosure, but served an important political purpose when it was made. Then, after the South Vietnamese had absorbed the notion that the Americans are leaving, the Cambodian operation provided a reassuring demonstration that RVNAF can operate successfully against NVA units and is actually strong enough to help another nation.

Ultimately, Vietnamization concerns the issue whether one million South Vietnamese soldiers, armed and trained by the United States and thus having the benefit of much modern technology, can contain and eventually defeat NVA/VC combat forces of less than 250,000 men using light weapons and the politico-military techniques of revolutionary war.

In this situation, morale is bound to be a key factor. Without the material resources that only the United States can provide, the South Vietnamese are not likely to have the necessary self-confidence, but well-managed emancipation from foreign tutelage may eventually be of equal if not even greater importance.

The most obvious ingredients of this delicate operation are:

1. South Vietnamese trust that the United States will not abandon them unilaterally or through a secret deal with Hanoi;
2. Confidence that the United States will continue to provide the material resources needed by a government that spends four times as much as it collects in revenue and exports nothing in exchange for its imports;
3. Adequate military supplies, not only while hostilities continue but as long as South Vietnam still faces a substantial armed Communist threat;
4. Assurance that the Saigon government will be able to run civil and military affairs as it sees fit, without excessive unsolicited foreign advice;
5. Last but not least the conviction that if the South Vietnamese authorities commit fatal errors, the United States will not step in again and save them, as in 1965.

The greatest threats facing the GVN in the period ahead are its own future mistakes, which may give the Communists opportunities that are not currently available to them. As Vietnamization proceeds, the United States will be less and less in a position to prevent such mistakes. The major

issue that the Thieu government will face is not whether it is fully representative of the people of South Vietnam, but whether it can govern in such fashion as to be more acceptable to the people than the Vietnamese Communists. Anti-colonial rhetoric has argued successfully that "self-government is preferable to good government," where the issue was government by nationals versus government by foreigners. But where the competition is between two national elite groups, neither of which enjoys great popularity or broadly accepted legitimacy, success is an intricate blend of factors, including coercive capacity, to be sure, but also performance of useful services, i.e., good government.

The population of South Vietnam must assess relative benefits and relative deprivations, and reach conclusions based not on standards of American political philosophy but on its own experience and values. Some observers believe that the Communists have lost popular support in recent years but that the Saigon government has not gained much of it. But not so much for lack of representativeness as for lack of service to the people. Except for a small minority of Western-educated individuals, constitutional legality and democratic representation are not meaningful operative principles in a society that has experienced in succession oriental despotism, French colonialism, Japanese militarism, protracted warfare, and a variety of civil and military dictatorships, but never representative government.

With few exceptions, even those who invoke Western political principles do so as a weapon against their opponents rather than out of deep philosophical persuasion. Their past behavior and proclaimed beliefs suggest that if they were successful in gaining power they would neither practice what they preached nor be bothered by the discrepancy.

This does not mean that the South Vietnamese population fails to react favorably to a government responsive to its felt needs, or unfavorably to a particularly exploitative or oppressive one. The well-worn cliché about the "mandate of Heaven" conveys in symbolic fashion the power of popular satisfaction and dissatisfaction with a government. Only unusually bad governments seem to lose it.

In societies that have not yet acquired or do not practice Western concepts of legal representation, where elected officials are therefore

not explicitly considered holders of a revocable popular mandate, a government is "representative" if it is responsive to the felt needs of the population, regardless of the method by which it acquired power. Conversely, an elected government is not necessarily "representative" if it acts on behalf of the interests of an oligarchy, in disregard of the felt needs of the masses.

In South Vietnam and other transitional societies a vote is more likely to express deference to the person soliciting it, than investiture with a mandate to represent the interests of the voter. An elected official is not really viewed as a representative of a constituency or of the people at large. Lacking democratic experience, Vietnamese politicians operating above the village level do not act like representatives of the people even though they use Western-style rhetoric. The people in turn are not likely to expect the fulfillment of an "electoral mandate." "Representative" politics above the village/hamlet level are a pretext for participation in elite maneuvers for power and material gain. Demands by elite elements for a "broadening of the political base of the government" are in most instances the personal claims of professional politicians for greater material benefits rather than demands on behalf of broader interest groups.

The Crucial Importance of a Correct Rural Strategy

While the representative principle is a fiction at the national and regional levels in South Vietnam, it could be of significance at the village/hamlet level. The Communists and the Saigon government have both promoted the holding of local elections. In March 1968, after the Tet offensive, the Communists issued instructions for the election of People's Liberation Councils and People's Liberation Committees, following the pattern of the Viet Minh People's Committees set up in villages in the resistance areas against the French after 1945. "Armed adolescents" -- Pierre Gourou wrote about that period -- "have replaced the peaceful councils of notables."

French colonial policy after World War I had replaced the traditional councils of village notables, selected by co-optation, with elected councils.

The natural leaders of the people -- according to Paul Mus -- engineered the election to the councils of men of little worth and opposed the system from behind the scene. In 1941 the pro-Vichy authorities restored the traditional prerogatives of the council of notables and abolished the elective councils.

Then, in 1945, young Viet Minh revolutionaries took over. They became a shadow government when the French colonial administration was able to reinstate the village councils. Under Bao Dai new village councils were elected by universal suffrage in 1953, which were in turn replaced by councils appointed by the province chiefs under a decree issued by President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1956.

This was again reversed by decrees drafted in December 1966 and April 1969, with American assistance, introducing the equivalent of a legislative and executive branch at the village level -- the Village People's Council, to be elected by the villagers by universal, direct, and secret ballot every three years, and the Village Administrative Committee, elected by the Village People's Council. Hamlet Management Committees were to be elected in the same way by hamlet residents. Province chiefs were instructed by President Thieu to hold elections as soon as possible after securing an area.

There are wide fluctuations in the number of villages and hamlets listed in different official sources, in part because old communities are abandoned and new ones established as the result of military operations, but by the end of 1970, elections had been held in 2048 out of 2151 villages and 9849 out of 10,496 GVN-dominated hamlets. The Vietnamese Communists in turn have formed between 600 and 1200 People's Liberation Committees. In some cases both sides have held elections in the same village. Elections were held for provincial and municipal councils on June 28, 1970, but some responsible and astute observers believe that the influence of the province and district chiefs appointed by the GVN had a significant impact on the results.

It is obvious that even if the actual returns are accurately reported by the authorities, these elections are far from reflecting the true choices of the population, for what that would be worth. All candidates are screened -- by both sides -- at district level. The district chief, who is an army officer appointed by the Saigon authorities, selects

the candidates acceptable to the GVN. The district committee of the People's Revolutionary Party decides on the candidates acceptable to the Communists.

What all this really means to the people is not clear in the absence of information on whether either side has been able to enlist the natural leaders of the people and thus generate genuine local support. It is open to question whether there still is a real power structure in the villages of South Vietnam after fifty years of external interference in their affairs. It may well be that the villages have ceased being organic entities -- if they ever were -- and that the rival authorities representing the two sides in the civil war are both rejected by a majority of the population.

But there are also indicators that the Thieu government is not doing too badly in this protracted competition for popular support. Its great advantage is that because of American assistance it can give to the villagers instead of taking from them as the Communists do. In April 1969, President Thieu announced at the end of the first training course for local officials held at Vung Tau that each village with an elected village council would receive 1,000,000 piastres and each village without elected officials 400,000 piastres for use in local improvement projects, as determined by local officials.

Village chiefs were also given nominal command authority over Popular Force, Revolutionary Development, and People's Self-Defense personnel stationed in their village, and despite opposition from some ARVN leaders, this authority is slowly becoming real. The fact that more and more men are armed by the GVN as a People's Self-Defense Force, and have received over half a million firearms for the defense of their own communities, while the Communists have to recruit for combat units scheduled to operate far from their homes, gives the GVN an advantage over its enemies. It reverses the situation that prevailed a few years ago when service in VC units was near home, while recruitment into ARVN meant being sent away.

The GVN Land Reform Program is another potentially important factor. Signed by President Thieu on March 26, 1970, it will be one of the most far-reaching reform measures in the history of Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, by the end of 1970 hardly any land had been transferred to new owners.

In the past, the Vietnamese military lacked the "populist" bias that is found in some Third World armies of revolutionary origin. That all province and district chief positions are held by army officers has resulted in a disastrous lack of concern for popular needs and aspirations. If the changes promising to enhance local authority in 1969 truly marked a new departure in this respect and not just a campaign of propaganda speeches, the local authorities sponsored by the Saigon government may gradually be accepted by the villagers, on pragmatic grounds, and in time acquire real legitimacy. Vietnamization will of course test the system, as GVN authorities will acquire larger discretionary powers in the use of resources for pacification than they had in the past, when they were supervised by U.S. advisers.

If corruption and callousness are contained by the key officials appointed by General Thieu, it is conceivable that his regime will gain a base of direct popular support. Then villages will be linked to central and regional authorities through local officials committed directly to the GVN, without the intermediary of urban professional politicians, and through groups such as refugees and members of RVNAF families, who are bound to play a new role in Vietnamese society in the future.

If it acts wisely in its relations with the rural sector, the Thieu regime could acquire a substantial measure of popular acceptance and eventually legitimacy, despite relatively repressive policies against urban critics such as professional politicians and journalists, and urban demonstrators such as students, veterans, and Buddhists. As long as the villagers find the regime relatively advantageous to them, compared with the Communists and with past Saigon governments, neither demands for representative institutions above the village level nor indignation at the denial of civil liberties to some members of the elite are likely to arouse the rural masses.

Regardless of how total the dependence of South Vietnam on American assistance is, and even of how much the masses benefit directly from the distribution of these resources, the presence of foreign troops is never popular. Therefore, as Vietnamization results in the disappearance of Americans from the countryside, nationalist sentiment in favor of the GVN should increase, unless it fails to provide on its own security and social benefits for the masses.

It will not have to work sudden miracles: if Vietnamization does not result in a marked deterioration of the situation, its impact on the population should on balance be beneficial. Only the urban elites, which have substantial material and ideological interests at stake, are likely to require strong guarantees that the United States will not abandon them. The masses, especially in the countryside, have much less to lose by a change of regime and are probably not concerned by the risks of Vietnamization. On the other hand, they are likely to respond favorably to the positive aspects of Vietnamization, which for them will not be cancelled out by fear of the consequences of American disengagement, if the GVN does not use its newly won freedom of action in an excessively vexatious or exploitative fashion.

What emerges from these reflections on the future of the Saigon regime in the period of Vietnamization is the thought that the Thieu government, based on the strengthened Vietnamese armed forces, has more to gain from seeking a partnership with the masses, especially in the rural sector, than from courting the support of the urban elites. Developments throughout 1970 suggest that this may indeed be President Thieu's current political strategy, as a reaction to his frustrating experience with politicians in 1968-1969, when he was trying to broaden the political base of his regime.

It may at first glance seem utopian to think about an alliance between the military and the masses in a country in which the officer corps has elitist contempt for the people, while the masses are imbued with traditional cultural viewpoints of Confucian origin, which place soldiers at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The difficulty of overcoming these attitudes is obvious, especially when they are compounded by sharp clashes of material interests between men who destroy and consume and men who build and produce.

To gauge the impact of the war on the Vietnamese masses, one has to keep in mind that in 1960 ARVN numbered 148,000 men and all other paramilitary formations another 99,000. From less than a quarter of a million, the armed forces have grown in one decade to more than one million. If the Vietnamese people had to support by their own labor this military establishment, which has increased fourfold, they would have to

be totally enslaved, and economic resources would have to be extracted from them by naked terror.

This has not happened, of course, because of American aid, which pays not only for the upkeep of the Vietnamese armed forces but also about three-quarters of all expenditures of the GVN. One cannot expect the masses to understand that the militarization of Vietnamese society created, under the specific circumstances of the 1960s, employment not only for the one million men who "export" their services (to the extent that the United States pays for them), but also for those who took their place in the economy. The consequence is that instead of unemployment and underemployment South Vietnam today has over-full employment, and the population is irritated but not oppressed by the military.

If ways could be found to provide incentives for the military to improve their attitude toward the masses, the many small vexations experienced by the population in its daily life could be tolerated, whereas if the Vietnamese armed forces had to live off the land, "correct" behavior alone could not overcome the substantial deprivations that they would cause. In this respect the Saigon regime has a major advantage over the Vietnamese Communists, who are forced to supply some 300,000 fighters and cadres almost entirely with resources extracted from the Southern population, either by direct coercion of the producer or by extorting financial contributions with which to pay for the supplies.

Ten years ago the villagers of South Vietnam may not have chafed under the burden of supplying the VC guerrillas, many of whom were their neighbors or relatives. But the length of time that has passed, and the number of men currently involved, now including many who are foreign to the region in which they operate, must have alienated all but the most fanatic supporters of the Communist campaign. The United States and the GVN could not commit a more dangerous mistake in the context of Vietnamization than to surrender this major advantage by making the South Vietnamese armed forces economically more dependent on the population than they have been in the past.

Besides efforts to create a genuine representative government at the local level and to keep the burden of the military establishment light, the Thieu government's successful partnership with the masses

will also depend on a third crucial factor, namely the attitude of the officer and NCO corps toward the people. As mentioned earlier, unlike military establishments of revolutionary origin, which seem to have acquired a "populist" outlook while fighting as guerrillas for national independence, the South Vietnamese officer corps has an elitist bias.

The Confucian-mandarin tradition inherited from Chinese culture; imitation of French policy, which excluded individuals without the baccalaureate from the officer corps; and historical circumstances that led to the development of the present armed forces from an initial group of Vietnamese military who fought with the French against the Communist-controlled but mass-supported national liberation movement, have all conspired to imbue the South Vietnamese officers with contempt for the people.

If Vietnamization is to succeed, the cadres of the South Vietnamese army, including junior officers and NCOs, will have to be trained not only in technical skills and military leadership but also in their attitude toward the people. A corrupt army causes material losses. A corrupt and contemptuous army adds insult to injury.

If the argument developed above holds, namely that the Vietnamese armed forces compare favorably with the Communists with regard to the material deprivations they inflict on the masses, it would be sheer folly for the Thieu government not to make full use of this advantage by indoctrinating the Vietnamese officer corps concerning its relations with the population. The expanding mission of the Vietnamese armed forces will require substantial new appointments and promotions of officers. RVNAF could gain considerable leverage over the attitudes of its officers if ratings would take into account officers' behavior toward the population.

The task of restructuring the values and attitudes of some 50,000 elitist officers may seem, at first sight, forbiddingly great. But about one-third of these have entered the officer corps in the last two years. The first ARVN officers, of the French-trained "class of '51," entered service less than twenty years ago. Perhaps elitist traditions are not yet so deeply ingrained as to defeat a major effort of retraining if the officer corps were exposed intensively during Vietnamization to correct

doctrines concerning the military value of popular support and to the relatively simple methods through which it can be obtained.

Can Vietnamization Succeed?

The question is often asked why one expects the RVNAF to be able to achieve by itself what it was unable to do in partnership with 600,000 Allies. The answer depends on too many factors to allow apodictic statements. Factors in the current situation that favor RVNAF are:

1. The GVN proclaimed general mobilization only in June 1968, after the Tet offensive, but now has more than 1,000,000 men fighting against 250,000 Communists.

2. When U.S. combat forces were sent to South Vietnam in 1965, ARVN numbered only 220,000 men, and the GVN did not dare give arms to paramilitary forces dispersed throughout the countryside, whereas the expanded RF/PF units are fully militarized, and the People's Self-Defense Force has received half a million firearms.

3. The Vietnamese soldiers, for a time outgunned by the VC/NVA forces with their AK-47 automatics, received American M-16 guns in 1968-1969.

4. RVNAF forces lacked till very recently their own artillery, air support, and helicopters, and are acquiring a significant modern capability only under current Vietnamization plans.

5. In 1964-1965 the Communists, led by veteran and fanatical Southern cadres and enjoying the peak of popular support, were a much more formidable adversary than they are today, when they suffer increasingly from lack of cadres, and the survivors' morale is shaky.

6. Past U.S. policy had a negative effect on the Vietnamese armed forces because we were too eager to do the job for them and gave the impression that our strategic interest in the defense of South Vietnam was so great that we would defend them against a Communist takeover regardless of what they did for themselves.

7. Only in 1967-1969 did the GVN, under U.S. prodding, launch a massive countrywide pacification program to complement US/ARVN offensive operations, the key feature of which was an expansion of rural local

security forces, RF/PF plus PSDF, RD cadre, police, etc., which has improved rural security.

8. The 1970 campaign in Cambodia and the 1971 campaign in Laos have considerably increased the self-confidence of RVNAF, which may develop an institutional resilience that would help it absorb in the future reverses that would have been shattering in the past.

There are also factors that could favor the Lao Dong party and nullify RVNAF's advantages:

1. War weariness among RVNAF personnel and members of their families (which is difficult to assess) might outweigh all ideological, material, or disciplinary incentives prompting the South Vietnamese military to continue to fight.

2. Internecine strife within the armed forces, either separate from or in connection with the 1971 presidential elections, could flare up and paralyze RVNAF's combat capability, giving the NVA/VC forces the awaited opportunity for a general offensive.

3. The withdrawal of U.S. combat forces may have a stronger psychological impact on RVNAF than could be anticipated, and the resulting shock might facilitate a rapid expansion of Communist subversive influence within the military establishment.

4. The NVA/VC forces may reveal an unexpected capacity for a major offensive after the withdrawal of American combat forces, having held in reserve a larger pool of highly trained military cadres, and having prepositioned more ample stocks of supplies than we believed possible, and could use these assets for imaginative new battle plans, taking RVNAF by surprise.

In the author's opinion, these factors -- which could indeed give the Lao Dong party the upper hand -- are not likely to outweigh in the foreseeable future those working for RVNAF. We may have been extravagantly wasteful in the way we operated in Vietnam since 1965, but eventually we reversed the course of the war and strengthened the GVN/RVNAF system. The Communist leadership, regardless of what it says in psychological warfare and propaganda, cannot expect victory if the GVN does not commit major policy errors in the way it conducts its relations with the United States and with its own population. If it alienates the

population beyond a certain threshold, its whole war machine might grind to a halt. If the Saigon regime becomes repugnant to a decisive number of Americans, it might lose the material support without which it cannot survive. But as long as the GVN/RVNAF is able to function at least as well as it is at present, the Lao Dong leaders face a difficult choice among three major options, none of which promises them quick victory:

1. The Communists could send large numbers of NVA troops South and stage a major offensive. But the preparations for such a campaign would encounter immense difficulties now that restraints on the use of American air power and South Vietnamese ground forces in Cambodia and Laos have been abandoned. Furthermore, the North Vietnamese reservoir of trained military manpower is not bottomless. The NVA currently operates in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, with perhaps one-half its total strength deployed in those three theaters. Besides, it has also the major mission of protecting North Vietnam itself against the threat of a South Vietnamese invasion, which becomes increasingly possible as Vietnamization progresses.

Unless Communist China becomes willing to commit troops to the defense of North Vietnam, the Lao Dong leaders cannot afford to leave their own territory denuded of defenses. And even if the Chinese did pledge help, it is unlikely that the North Vietnamese leaders would want to bring Chinese troops into their country, except as a desperate last resort. It is hard to believe that they would find the Chinese presence a reasonable trade-off for liberating additional manpower for operations in South Vietnam, the success of which would be far from certain.

Furthermore, it is doubtful the Chinese Communists would want to risk a move that might result in war with the United States at a time when neither their domestic consolidation, nor their military resources, nor their relations with the Soviet Union gives them reason to be confident about the successful outcome of such a venture.

Without a substantial increase of troops in the South, it is doubtful that the NVA/VC high command would consider a major offensive worth undertaking at this time. Judging from the offensives of 1968-1969, the results would not be very rewarding to the Lao Dong militarily, and would cost heavily in manpower. No urban areas could be held more than temporarily against American and South Vietnamese firepower. Politically,

such an offensive could hardly achieve more than the shock of the surprise Tet offensive of 1968, which was not only weathered by the GVN/RVNAF but may actually have galvanized the South Vietnamese into the militant posture that made Vietnamization possible and thus nullified the advantages gained by Hanoi from accelerating American disengagement. Plausible future NVA/VC offensives cannot hope to achieve more, if the resources currently available to the Communists in the South are matched against the resources protecting the GVN, whereas such offensives could bring about a full resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam and prevent its economic development which has recently become the top priority of the Lao Dong leaders.

2. Alternatively, the Communists could continue a policy of "conservation of resources," using their combat troops and political cadres sparingly and cautiously, harassing U.S. and ARVN forces and disrupting pacification. But they must realize that this strategy cannot bring them victory. Protracted war did not succeed against Chiang Kai-shek in China. It only allowed the Chinese Communists to survive until the Japanese destroyed the power base of the Kuomintang and the United States defeated the Japanese, leaving the field clear for the Communist *coup de grâce*. Protracted war is only a way of buying time, in the hope that unexpected developments will provide a favorable opening for a new victory strategy.

Several circumstances affecting American or South Vietnamese public opinion could provide the Communists with such new opportunities:

a. Gross mismanagement of the resources provided by the United States could prompt Congress, in response to public pressure, to deny the funds necessary for continued support of the GVN and RVNAF. Unquestionably, in the foreseeable future the Saigon regime cannot survive without massive American military and economic assistance. Excessive waste in the use of American resources and blatant corruption would make it increasingly difficult to secure from Congress the appropriations that South Vietnam will need in the 1970s.

b. Whereas the population of South Vietnam will probably accept the absence of democracy and those forms of corruption that involve transferring into the private accounts of the elite part of the resources provided by the United States, it could be mobilized politically against the Saigon regime by exceptionally brutal and cynical mistreatment and

exploitation by the military and civilian bureaucracies. The urban masses are, of course, more volatile than the rural population, and inflation and unemployment could ignite major urban militancy against the GVN, forcing the latter to become increasingly oppressive. But excessive delays in implementing the land reform of March 1970 and an erroneous economic policy could also increase rural militancy and make the situation of the Saigon government untenable militarily as well as politically. If the Thieu regime became intolerable to the masses, this would change the political equation and directly release material resources and human energy in support of the Communist cause, or create chaos which could only benefit the Lao Dong in the long run.

c. War weariness could attain unexpected proportions and paralyze the South Vietnamese state. It goes without saying that the population of no country wants military operations on its territory. But the endurance of civilians is great and their breaking point not easily predictable. Obviously, the longer the war is likely to last the more important it becomes to apply extreme restraint to the use of violence. Excessive resort to firepower, forced displacement of the civilian population, brutalities by government forces -- all contribute to the lowering of the threshold to the point where ending hostilities becomes the only meaningful objective, regardless of consequences.

3. The Communists are bound to realize that if Vietnamization succeeds it might take a generation before conditions are ripe for another major offensive against the South. No group of men who have dedicated twenty-five years of their lives and sacrificed hundreds of thousands of their followers to the achievement of a political goal is likely to accept such an outcome, as long as an alternative is available. To express willingness to continue the war for a generation is high-sounding rhetoric but bitter politics; however worded, it is for practical purposes an admission of defeat.

As long as the Vietnamese Communists hoped to see the United States abandon the war, as the French had done in 1954, their intransigence with regard to negotiations was strategically smart. Demanding the unconditional withdrawal of all American troops and replacement by the United States of the Saigon government with a coalition cabinet that would include

Communists told the world that they consider themselves invincible. But if the Lao Dong leaders reach the conclusion that their military strategies cannot succeed, they might resort to a more flexible negotiating stance as an instrument of political warfare. This third option available to Hanoi will be discussed at greater length below.

Possible Communist Political Counter-Moves

If the only alternatives available to the United States were to keep American forces fighting for victory with no early end in sight, against an enemy that has much more at stake than we do, or to give up a cause both hopeless and of marginal importance to the United States, Hanoi's intransigence might have been sufficient to secure the achievement of Communist goals. But successful Vietnamization raises complex new problems for the Lao Dong leaders. As the Nixon Administration has repeatedly pointed out, the Communists' bargaining position deteriorates as Vietnamization progresses. It is therefore to be expected that -- although in the author's opinion the issues of the Vietnamese conflict are not negotiable -- the Lao Dong leaders might in time feign a more flexible negotiating stance as an instrument of political warfare.

The Communists could decide at some future date to adopt a conciliatory posture, agreeing, for instance, to discuss the American May 14, 1969 or October 7, 1970 proposals without preconditions. This would allow them a novel and subtle political game, without having to make any real substantive concessions.

It is occasionally suggested that the Communists must remain intransigent in order to maintain the revolutionary élan of their combat and political cadres. While the argument has some merit, the effect of negotiations on the morale of their forces need not be an insurmountable obstacle to an organization with considerable experience in political indoctrination, especially in a period when a strategy of protracted war reduces the demands on their forces.

Furthermore, the potential gains of this political strategy might considerably outweigh the potential losses. The impact in South Vietnam of a thaw in the Communist position could be enormous. The South Vietnamese

elites were guided since 1954 by the axiom that their country is strategically vital to the United States and will therefore be denied to the Communists at any cost. Consequently, many members of the Vietnamese elite felt that they could carry on as usual, leaving it to others to fight the war. The Tet offensive and the bombing halt in 1968, then Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine in 1969 seem to have induced a national awakening.

Once it was no longer an article of faith that the United States could not afford to lose South Vietnam, Vietnamization was bound to have a shock effect on the elites in that country. This has manifested itself in the Thieu government's efforts to implement mass mobilization, seek popular support, adopt fiscal legislation unpopular with the consumption-oriented urban population, improve public administration, and enforce military discipline.

If the Communists decided, while Vietnamization progresses, to counter this trend by inducing a real thaw in the Paris talks, offered to discuss a cease-fire and a process of self-determination, and kept the public discussion of these issues going, the atmosphere of "struggle for survival" on which the success of Vietnamization depends could be rapidly dispelled. The Vietnamese armed forces may come to have second thoughts about the value of supreme sacrifices while a "deal" is being negotiated in Paris. Some of the South Vietnamese military leaders and certain elements with strong ideological or material interests may of course become more intransigent, stubbornly determined to oppose a political solution, but it is not certain that they would not be swept away by the political stampede of those who would seek eleventh-hour insurance against the risks of a change in political regime.

The Thieu government could find itself in a very difficult position. Even if its sympathies and interests were with the "hawks," extreme inflexibility on its part could generate considerable additional hostility in the United States, where that government is already under attack by powerful members of Congress, news commentators, academics, and many others. As Thieu's government will depend even more than in the past on huge amounts of military and economic assistance, it would have to appear reasonable, so as not to jeopardize its chances for the material

assistance that it will need for years to come. Important segments of Congress and of American public opinion would probably resent intensely continued sacrifices for a government that sabotaged "promising" peace talks. Mediocre performance, venality, and all the other accepted flaws of the Saigon regime, which would probably be condoned if Vietnamization were seen as "the only way out," would appear intolerable coming from a government that "refuses peace talks."

If circumstances forced the Thieu government to participate in active negotiations for a political solution, then it could no longer justify a firm authoritarian regime, suppressing criticism and eliminating the opposition to further the prosecution of the war. The Vietnamization strategy of an alliance between the military and the rural masses would have to be reinforced by the creation of an urban coalition in preparation for a possible political confrontation with the Communists. As a necessary step toward a political settlement, the various non-Communist political groups that stand any chance of gaining votes in internationally supervised elections would have to be given an early opportunity to recruit, organize, and campaign. The preceding discussion of the requirements of negotiations and of Vietnamization should support the argument developed below that successful American disengagement will require a delicate blend of policies, carried out with wisdom as well as luck. The Saigon regime will have to be stable and firm without becoming excessively oppressive. Military objectives will have to be pursued in ways that will not drain excessively either South Vietnamese or American resources. Judicious economic aid policies will be required to help the GVN cement its relations with the masses, the civil service, and RVNAF.

PART III: ON POLICY

The Military Balance of Forces: Superiority or "Sufficiency"?

OUR GOAL in the past has been to achieve peace in South Vietnam either by forcing the Lao Dong to stop fighting or by a political settlement, when in fact our only objective should have been to help the GVN/RVNAF achieve "sufficiency" in the military balance of forces with the Communists. We assumed that in order to be successful in South Vietnam we must aim at training the GVN/RVNAF to perform in accordance with highest American standards.

By setting our standards too high, we ran the risk of defeating our purposes in view of the growing impatience with the war in the United States. Vietnamization need not aim at leaving behind a GVN/RVNAF system approximating American standards of perfection. It will be "good enough" if it can be given strong odds to hold its own against future Communist efforts to destroy it.

The Communists' "protracted war" strategy will have to be countered by constant and conscious efforts to continue to alter the military balance of forces in favor of GVN/RVNAF, so as to create a situation that can stalemate the Communists permanently at minimum cost to the United States.

The problem of how to evaluate the balance of forces in Vietnam raises difficult and interesting methodological questions, besides posing formidable practical difficulties. No quantitative or qualitative assessment is likely to be definitive.

The biases of the most important American experts on Vietnam, such as the members of the Mission Council in Saigon, are likely to be -- for understandable reasons -- on the sceptical side. As men responsible for

the final outcome of our costly and tragic efforts on behalf of South Vietnam, they must think and act as risk-minimizers. From their point of view, "sufficiency" cannot be preferable to a situation that guarantees against failure. The GVN/RVNAF leaders are likely to have the same biases, at least as long as they continue to doubt their own capacities. Despite these understandable apprehensions, the principal American objective should be henceforth the consolidation of a South Vietnamese politico-military system able to resist indefinitely Communist efforts to destroy it, with only such American assistance as can be realistically pledged under the political circumstances currently prevailing in the United States.

The concept of balance of forces is easier to grasp intuitively than analytically. Complex interactions are at work in Vietnam among a wide variety of factors. Optimally, it might be interesting and useful to construct an abstract model defining these relationships and then to ascribe quantitative values to the various factors involved. In practice, as such a model has not been developed and tested in the past, a theoretical effort at this time would risk diverting attention from substantive to methodological questions, without any guarantee that the results would be more credible from the policymakers' point of view than the disciplined use of common sense. It should be possible to apply informed judgment on a sectoral basis to the question of what conditions would have to prevail to give the GVN/RVNAF solid odds against the Lao Dong Party.

"Sufficiency" would have to be estimated in each sector of activity. Militarily, for instance, one would have to be almost certain that the enemy would not be able to destroy RVNAF and break the GVN's will to resist. It would not be necessary to aim at levels of performance that would promise an early and complete termination of the use of violence by the Communist forces.

Other countries have been able to cope on their own with high levels of violence, for extended periods of time. In Colombia, "la violencia" claimed 200,000 lives between 1948 and 1958. It led to the establishment of a military dictatorship, which in turn, after four years, resulted in the establishment in 1957 of the National Front, which has since then given Colombia a good civilian constitutional government.

Judging from past events, it is most unlikely that one could miscalculate the military balance so badly as to be faced with a victorious "surprise offensive" by the Communists if RVNAF were then left to fight the war by itself. In 1964, when RVNAF seemed to disintegrate and was much weaker than it is today and the Communist forces had not yet lost some of their best cadres, South Vietnam had enough resilience to survive throughout the relatively lengthy period required for the build-up of American combat forces. It can, of course, be argued that the expectations created by the landing of American combat forces in South Vietnam and the bombing of North Vietnam by American planes made the difference, allowing RVNAF to hold during the lengthy period of American build-up. The author suspects that on closer scrutiny this argument would turn out to be spurious. It implies that the anticipated arrival of United States forces made the South Vietnamese fight better. It is doubtful that their performance increased, but even at their weakest they were not so weak as to collapse suddenly. Without American forces and the subsequent massive build-up of RVNAF, the Communist forces may eventually have won a decisive victory. How long it would have taken them to paralyze the GVN/RVNAF system completely is now an unanswerable hypothetical question.

In any case, in the period ahead, even if partial and temporary reverses did occur, they could not lead to a complete collapse of the GVN/RVNAF system, unless the latter were already paralyzed by economic chaos, political subversion, and military defeats of larger magnitude than can be anticipated as long as the present regime, with its known characteristics of cautious rationality, is in power and receives adequate American material assistance. Under "normal" conditions, the risks to South Vietnam are no longer of the same order of magnitude as in 1964. Even the Tet offensive of 1968, which was the high point of Communist efforts to win by a military "big push," did not produce lasting advantages for the Communists. Of course, American combat troops participated in the battles fought during the Tet offensive, especially in Saigon and in Hué. But, according to General W. C. Westmoreland's *Report on the War in Vietnam*, "In most cities, Regional and Popular Forces, and the South Vietnamese Army threw back the enemy attacks within two or three days -- in some cases, within hours." General Westmoreland adds that "although

the fight was touch-and-go in many places at the outset, no South Vietnamese military units were destroyed and their casualties were relatively low considering the heavy engagements they fought." In the light of the additional experience gained by RVNAF since the 1968 Tet offensive and of the build-up that has taken place since then, it can be argued that the Communist forces cannot expect to be more successful in the future than they were in January-February 1968.

On the other hand, as neither a negotiated agreement between Communists and anti-Communists nor the destruction of the Lao Dong Party seems probable, the elimination of violence from South Vietnam is also not likely. The ratio of four to one in favor of RVNAF may not be sufficient to destroy the Communist forces, but it is likely to be sufficient to retain control of the country, especially as South Vietnam has learned to live with endemic turbulence and cannot be paralyzed by it.

Some recent studies point to the redundancy of much of the firepower used on our side in South Vietnam. Without discussing at length the negative consequences of "overkill" on the civilian population and on the economy of the country, there are obvious conclusions to be derived from such studies with regard to Vietnamization. Only a small fraction of air power has been used in the past for close combat support. Therefore, RVNAF can fight effectively with much less air power than the USAF has deployed in South Vietnam. This could mean a much shorter lead-time for training flight and maintenance crews than would be required given more ambitious (or risk minimizing) objectives. The cost of equipment and ordnance could also be scaled down considerably.

It should be possible to estimate the utility of increments of firepower. It may then become apparent that not much additional Vietnamization, both in the training of RVNAF personnel and in the transfer of equipment, would be needed to maintain the present favorable situation indefinitely. By applying today a tough-minded rule of "sufficiency," the GVN/RVNAF leaders would stand a better chance of getting, in the future, the American military assistance on which their survival will depend for a long time to come. Excessive demands could foster Congressional budgetary resistance.

The same spirit of parsimony should govern RVNAF operations in Cambodia and Laos. While such campaigns are easily justifiable in purely

military terms, as they surely prevent the NVA forces from consolidating their bases of operation against South Vietnam, they will exact a heavy political toll in the United States -- as long as RVNAF requires massive support from American air power.

What could the enemy do to regain superiority against the growing capacity of RVNAF? "Protracted war" is a victory strategy only if it aims either at buying time for the development of much stronger NVA/VC forces than the enemy has currently available, or if it assumes that continued warfare of a level of intensity insufficient to win militarily is nevertheless sufficient eventually to break RVNAF's will to resist and American determination to furnish whatever assistance might be needed in the future after the withdrawal of United States combat forces.

The build-up of larger NVA/VC forces depends on two factors: the additional amounts of manpower the Lao Dong Party is likely to be willing and able to mobilize and sacrifice without threatening the future of its segment of the Vietnamese nation for a generation or more, and the level of military assistance the Soviet Union and China will be willing to make available and able to deliver to North Vietnam. It is unlikely that the Lao Dong leaders base their policy decisions on a simplistic estimate of the total number of draftable males without estimating the long-term demographic, economic, and military implications of the loss of a substantial proportion of that sector of their population. Extreme losses of combat-capable males could even lead to a future situation of weakness that would encourage South Vietnam to attempt the conquest of the North.

This concern was expressed in May 1969 by Ho Chi Minh himself in a meeting with what Hanoi Radio described as "the high ranking cadres of the entire army." Congratulating the military cadres on behalf of the Central Committee and the government for their "numerous achievements and worthy contributions to the common victories" in the 1968 offensives, Ho Chi Minh warned them that the United States "remained very stubborn" and that the Communist armed forces "will have to overcome many sacrifices and hardships in order to move toward final victory." He then urged the cadres to "economize human and material resources."

Ho Chi Minh's statement marked a major turn in the Vietnam war, namely the abandonment of hopes by the Lao Dong leaders for an early

victory and the decision to revert to low-intensity protracted war. The new strategy was discussed secretly at great length in a document issued in July 1969 as COSVN Resolution No. 9 by the Lao Dong high command in South Vietnam and then publicly, in December 1969, in a major article by North Vietnamese Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap.

Even if the decision to economize manpower was the result of long-term considerations of national policy and perhaps also of a strategic decision to save military forces for renewed offensives after the withdrawal of American combat troops, rather than the result of inability to make up for casualties suffered in the past, there are indications that with regard to military and especially training cadres the enemy may be suffering real shortages.

The other factor to be considered in examining whether the Communists can increase their armed forces so as to threaten again to overwhelm RVNAF concerns military equipment. Even assuming that, unlike arms deliveries to Third World countries such as Indonesia and the United Arab Republic, but similar to the case of North Korea, these military supplies are treated as grants rather than loans, Soviet and Chinese military equipment still cannot be regarded as a free good from the point of view of either the donors or the recipient. The two sponsors of North Vietnam must have views on the opportunity costs to themselves of the material made available to Hanoi. Even though interdiction of NVA supply lines has not succeeded in stopping the flow of arms and ammunition to the combat zones, it has escalated the cost of the war both to the producers of the equipment and to the North Vietnamese, whose use of manpower for logistic purposes has correspondingly increased. Even if the Lao Dong leaders do not have to consider whether they can afford to inflate their foreign debt to the Soviet Union and to China, they still have to consider the less tangible obligations that they incur and their future needs for other forms of aid.

The range of questions sketched in the preceding paragraphs is likely to be difficult, perhaps impossible to answer. An attempt should nevertheless be made to estimate whether North Vietnam will be able to match the RVNAF forces in the future, in numbers, equipment, and training. Even if the answer to this question is affirmative, RVNAF would still

have the advantage of being on the defensive, which in major conventional attacks requires smaller numbers of troops and reduces the risk of fatalities in comparison with the forces on the offensive side (though the opposite is true for guerrilla operations -- but these by themselves cannot win the war).

The Impact of Politics on Vietnamization

The military balance of forces cannot be appraised without taking morale factors into account. These are the complex products of interactions between numerous experiences and expectations impinging on the minds of the troops. In this sense all political factors are in part determinants of military morale. But politics are also important in the broader context of determining the relationship of the military to the social system and to the population at large.

There is no empirical evidence or theoretical basis for the assumption that the soldiers of one type of political regime fight necessarily better than those of another. The morale of the military depends, it would seem, primarily on factors that affect them directly rather than on the total state of the system.

The relations between the military and the population are another matter. Civilians are not directly and immediately the concern of the government. They are not fed, clothed, and housed from public funds. Their attitude toward the government depends on broader and less tangible considerations, but their role in providing or denying support to the military can play a decisive role in an armed struggle between otherwise well-balanced forces.

In South Vietnam, the interaction between the population and the two contending armies is further complicated by the direct competition for popular sympathies and support between the political cadres of the two systems. It is clear that the population does not regard the representatives of the Lao Dong as good and those of the GVN as evil, as some critics of the war keep asserting. Were this the case, the Communists would already have won the war. Actually, during the Tet offensive of

early 1968, when RVNAF had to abandon the countryside in order to protect towns and cities, the rural population -- temporarily "liberated" from GVN/RVNAF control -- did not rise to help the VC consolidate their hold any more than did the urban population help them establish one.

Before the Tet offensive, about 68 percent of the population of South Vietnam lived in A, B, and C hamlets. As the result of the Tet offensive that percentage dropped to 60 percent, a loss of only 8 percent. In November 1968 the Accelerated Pacification Campaign was introduced, which had brought the population living in A, B, and C hamlets to around 95 percent by the end of 1970.

The Hamlet Evaluation System, which does register trends even if it may not measure control, shows that the political balance of forces is being altered. For American goals, fluctuations of a few percent in Hamlet Evaluation ratings are only of marginal significance -- like local military reverses -- as control of South Vietnam by the GVN cannot be seriously jeopardized by such minor changes in the total pattern.

The stability of the present regime would be threatened only if Communist control of the population again exceeded a certain level. We should not aim at a perfect score, which may require greater resources than are available and may indeed cost more than it is worth, but should be guided, once again, by the concept of "sufficiency" of GVN pacification efforts. In Southeast Asia few governments have complete control over their people. The GVN need not do better than other governments in the area -- such as the Burmese -- have done in holding their own over more than two decades against a wide array of opponents, never achieving total control of the country, but also never in serious danger of being overthrown.

The American objective would not be affected by changes of leadership within the present regime in South Vietnam unless such changes substantially increased Communist chances to secure control of the country. Such changes in leadership would be of no greater importance -- regardless of whether they are achieved through constitutional means or not -- than changes that have taken place in the last two decades in Burma, Thailand, and South Korea. Would a coup against President Thieu by one of his anti-Communist rivals, or his sudden death, give the Communists a better

chance to prevail than they had in 1963-1965? Intuitively, the answer to this last question is negative.

Even though there may be a lack of fervor in support for the GVN, the forces supporting the regime are at least relatively stronger today than they were in 1963-1965.

First, as the result of ten years of unfulfilled promises, heavy demands on manpower and supplies, the use of increasingly harsh methods to secure compliance, and atrocities during the 1968 Tet offensive, the Communists have lost popular support. Some experienced American observers believe that they may have had the sympathy of nearly 50 percent of the population in 1964-1965 but that this dropped to not more than 10-15 percent after Tet 1968. These are no indications that the popularity of the Lao Dong has increased in the last three years, and the death of Ho Chi Minh, who was an authentic national hero to all Vietnamese, may have been an irreplaceable loss to the Communist cause.

Second, while the mood of the Vietnamese "silent majority" may be "a plague on both your houses," the number of those who have a vested interest in the survival of the present system and who fear a Communist victory, has certainly increased. It would be interesting to have rather precise estimates of the size of the groups that have received tangible benefits from the present regime and the worth of their support.

The survival potential of a regime is not highly correlated with the enthusiasm it generates. If it were, most governments, in Western as well as non-Western countries, would be doomed. Mass enthusiasm is elicited only rarely; regimes based on intense mass manipulation have a low life expectancy. Few countries have had their morale boosted as Britain's was in World War II by Winston Churchill.

Applying the principle of "sufficiency," the question to ask is not how well the Thieu government can galvanize the spirit of the South Vietnamese but how closely it resembles the Diem government, which had a bizarre propensity to antagonize the population. Although disturbing political episodes such as the notorious case of Tran Ngoc Chau have taken place in South Vietnam in the first half of 1970, it remains to be seen whether the Thieu regime will provoke active opposition as

intensively as the Ngo brothers did. One can assert cautiously that so far it compares favorably with the latter.

The rhetoric that has accompanied our heavy involvement in the war has created false and harmful expectations about what political results can be achieved in South Vietnam. There is no reason to assume that a country torn by civil and international war for almost thirty years stands a better chance of achieving "instant democracy" than do the overwhelming majority of Third World countries that have not experienced even remotely comparable upheavals. We should ask not how many of the ideal standards of democratic government the GVN approximates, but how many of the errors and abuses that would threaten its survival it avoids.

The presidential election scheduled for October 3, 1971 poses this question in a very concrete fashion. The author believes that the RVNAF leaders, who are the principal supporters of the present regime, would have preferred not to hold elections while the war continues but found themselves trapped by the requirements of the 1967 Constitution adopted in response to American persuasion. In order to satisfy American expectations, they now have to jeopardize the stability of the GVN at the very moment when they are assuming an increasingly large share of the armed struggle against the Lao Dong. Many other Third World governments, which are not fighting for their survival, do not hold elections in periods of serious internal strife. Even the most advanced Western democracies have occasionally suspended normal constitutional processes during major national emergencies.

The irrationality of holding presidential elections in South Vietnam in October 1971 can hardly be denied. Even the most elementary political strategy would prompt the Lao Dong to try to penetrate and build up the "peace movement." This would allow the Communists to exploit the war weariness of some South Vietnamese and the humanitarian sentiments or political calculations of others.

A peace candidate need not be in any way responsive to direct Communist management. Indeed he may, like General Duong Van Minh, have an anti-Communist record. But any presidential candidate elected on a "peace" platform would have to terminate hostilities. This in turn

would be most likely to result in the early disintegration of RVNAF, which would thereafter probably receive either vastly reduced or no further U.S. assistance.

The NVA/VC forces, by contrast, would not only retain their present combat capability but would be able to increase it as their pool of trained manpower grew and absorbed additional Soviet and Chinese equipment. There is no symmetry in the impact of war termination on the two systems under such conditions. After a relatively short time the balance of forces could shift so drastically in favor of the Communists (at a time when a renewed commitment of American combat forces to Vietnam would be politically impossible) that a South Vietnamese "peace" cabinet would have no choice but to yield eventually to the political demands of the Lao Dong.

But even if a "peace" candidate were not victorious in the October 1971 elections, the divisiveness of the electoral campaign is bound to hamper the continuity of the administrative process on which the success of Vietnamization depends. Managing a country engaged in a war effort of the magnitude of South Vietnam's is extremely difficult even without the diversion of energies and the uncertainties engendered by electoral campaigning and by the strain on the population of intensive exposure to conflicting opinions and appeals.

Even if all candidates were in broad agreement on the country's basic goals, the social costs of an election in South Vietnam at this time would probably exceed the benefits that could be expected therefrom. None of the likely candidates is known to have substantially better leadership qualities or administrative ability than President Thieu. A Vietnamese election cannot reflect the search for "the man who . . ." The selection and nomination of candidates is not the very complex and sophisticated process characterizing American politics. Arbitrary or fortuitous factors play an incomparably greater role, and a true natural selection of popular leaders has not taken place in South Vietnam's short history since independence.

But not only are Vietnamese elections without significance in allowing the selection of men of unusual ability and leadership, they are also not significant in providing a mechanism for the expression of popular

preferences among rival and conflicting policies. Communist candidates are not eligible under the 1967 Constitution, and past administrative practice has also excluded explicit neutralists. The elections scheduled for October 1971 will give the people no opportunity for a major change of course, which is surely the most important function of the democratic process. In short, they fulfill neither the minimal objective of putting in office the person best qualified to make decisions within the framework of an established consensus, nor the maximal objective of determining a new direction if the people are dissatisfied with previous policies.

The author claims no special ability to forecast the outcome of the forthcoming Vietnamese elections. But if Vietnamization is the preferred course of the American war effort, it is obvious that our policies should aim at maximizing the confidence of the population of South Vietnam in the present regime.

One major factor in assuring that confidence is physical security against Communist violence, which depends in part on the judicious use of military capabilities over the whole Indochinese peninsula, but is to some extent beyond our control and that of the GVN, depending also on the short-run intentions and capabilities of the Communists. The other major factor is the state of the South Vietnamese economy, which in the short run depends almost entirely on American resources and policies.

A Misguided Economic Policy Could Imperil Vietnamization

Knowledgeable Vietnamese who are not in the GVN/RVNAF hierarchy but who formerly held very high positions told the author in 1968 that much better military results could have been obtained in the past if some of the funds spent on the prosecution of the war by American forces had been devoted to the improvement of the lot of RVNAF soldiers and their dependents. This line of reasoning seems to have been accepted by the U.S. and is cautiously being translated into policy. But in some American circles this point of view is still considered offensive and an indicator of the "moral decay" of the South Vietnamese political system. The argument set forth is that if the South Vietnamese believe that they fight for a "just cause," they should not need American money to perform better

and should indeed reject the notion of acting as if they were our "mercenaries." NVA/VC morale is mentioned as strikingly in contrast with this "mercenary" mentality of RVNAF, and conclusions are drawn about the respective chances for victory of the two systems. Such moral judgments and factual inferences aside, the question is whether for a fraction of the material cost of our military presence in South Vietnam (and at hardly any political cost to us) one could increase substantially the odds that RVNAF will not be defeated by the NVA/VC forces.

If at present (in FY 1971) the incremental cost of U.S. military operations in Vietnam is of the order of \$11 billion a year, it will surely be a bargain if for a fraction of this amount RVNAF will be able to carry on by itself. Better pay, security for the soldiers' dependents, modern housing, schooling, medical care, social security, and so forth might make this possible.

It is well established that the notoriously high desertion rate in RVNAF is not ideologically motivated. Unlike the situation in China in 1946-1949, neither RVNAF units nor individual soldiers defect to the Communists. Desertions are primarily motivated by concern for the welfare of the soldiers' dependents, prompting them to return periodically to their villages.

We should examine in detail the present conditions of RVNAF and estimate the costs of achieving not only superiority over the enemy in the order of battle, but also what it would cost to substantially increase the chances that RVNAF soldiers will continue to have personal reasons to defend South Vietnam.

It is not necessary to achieve ideological symmetry between the two sides. We need not enhance the "religious war" character of the conflict. Even if one assumes that the NVA/VC are strongly motivated ideologically, it is perfectly sound to aim at developing in RVNAF personnel the conviction that they are fighting not for abstract and elusive goals but for concrete benefits and prospects for themselves and for their dependents.

American views on Vietnam are distorted by an ambivalence in our own value system. We are a nation of pragmatists, but in public life we prefer to see ourselves as idealists, willing to sacrifice material

benefits for moral principles. As a consequence, we are tempted to denigrate the behavior of those who join the Lao Dong Party as motivated by selfish material interests and are upset if we have difficulty explaining the behavior of our Vietnamese allies in lofty idealistic terms. In fact, there is nothing admirable in ideologically inspired political action. Throughout recorded history, some of the worst acts of inhumanity have been perpetrated in the service of abstract ideas. Conversely, the welfare of whole communities has often been advanced through activities prompted primarily by self-interest.

If enough South Vietnamese become convinced that it is to their personal benefit to defend the present regime or even merely to deny help to the Lao Dong Party, the most intangible but perhaps also the most important factor in the balance of forces between the two competing systems could be decisively affected. What South Vietnam lacks today is not a better ideology than that offered by the Communists but the confident feeling that self-interest can be a meaningful and realistic purpose in the lives of the present and next generation, not in the crude form of seeking quick windfalls for immediate consumption "while it lasts" but in building a good life on solid grounds.

This would make both past sacrifices and future risks meaningful and acceptable. It is an erroneous but often-made assumption that people are more willing to die for abstract ideas than for concrete benefits. The history of the American nation is replete with acts of heroism by farmers, ranchers, miners, and traders who accepted great personal risks for private gain. There is nothing wrong if the South Vietnamese come to consider the risks of combat as the unavoidable price to be paid for material advances for themselves and their families.

Furthermore, it is increasingly open to question that NVA/VC soldiers have the same ideological commitment as the Vietminh volunteer guerrillas of 1946-1954, the survivors of which were the driving force of the insurgency in the 1960-1965 period. Today most NVA and VC combat soldiers are conscripts. Their morale is to a large extent a function of the quality of their leaders, and the gap between the opposing forces in this respect has narrowed by an upward movement in RVNAF and a downward one in NVA/VC forces. While the latter are gradually losing their most

dedicated cadres, those steeled in the war against France, the former are acquiring vested interests in the system now existing in South Vietnam. Younger RVNAF officers and NCOs are not former servants of French colonialists but a new generation of soldiers whose personal outlook on life has not been tainted by the past and whose performance is increasingly professional.

By contrast, current NVA/VC conscripts do not seem equal in combativeness to the older generation of guerrilla fighters. However strong their resentment of the American presence and despite constant misinformation about the losses and weakness of the United States in Communist propaganda sessions, maintenance of the morale of VC troops, and probably even more of NVA troops who do not fight on their own home grounds, would require greater doses of success, especially after ten years of war, than the enemy has been able to achieve. The result, as reflected in enemy documents captured in June 1970 in Cambodia, is pessimism about the outcome of the war, unwillingness to fight, and lack of confidence in Lao Dong Party policies. Even the Communist cadres and, of course, more so the less political conscript rank-and-file, express fear of protracted war and want a quick end to the fighting.

At this time, a well-conceived program of American economic inputs could consolidate the progress achieved since 1965. If simultaneously with the weapons needed for the future defense of South Vietnam, RVNAF also receives the material benefits that would make their use desirable from the personal point of view of the individual soldier, we will have turned the tables on the NVA/VC forces and will leave behind, as we exit, a power structure that the Communists will find extremely difficult to destroy.

At this stage in the war, the role of economic factors in successful Vietnamization requires greater concern than do the relations between political conditions and military performance. Although most contemporary social scientists have accepted de Tocqueville's insight that prosperity can breed instability, under present conditions in South Vietnam the side that offers tangible material benefits to the population is likely to be favored, especially when the other side takes resources without giving anything but promises in exchange.

Over a period of 20 years, through the end of 1970, the United States has spent or committed close to \$4.5 billion in economic aid to South Vietnam, including Food for Peace (PL 480). This represents the largest amount of economic aid transferred to any country since April 1948 under the various Foreign Assistance Acts and antecedent legislation. Direct U.S. economic aid reached a peak of \$646 million in FY 1967, then dropped to \$548 million in FY 1968 and to \$408 million in FY 1969. In addition, military expenditures during the same period generated annual foreign exchange earnings of about \$350 million for the GVN. Furthermore, these expenditures created well-paying direct and indirect employment opportunities for many Vietnamese civilians.

During that same period the Communists have drawn resources from the population to sustain an increasing number of Southern and Northern soldiers. The population has also had to live under constant conditions of stress, was frequently obliged to perform risky and exhausting labor services at the direction of VC cadres, and has suffered many casualties, inflicted of course by both sides.

It would take a very intense ideological or moral commitment to remain devoted to a cause that has demanded so much while giving so little. The common man, in any country, is a realist. Unfulfilled promises do not look as good ten years later as they did when first made. Widespread, fanatic dedication to the VC cause would be understandable if foreign oppression or indigenous tyranny were so brutal that against them no sacrifices would seem too costly.

But the present GVN has not been that oppressive. It does not pursue a systematic policy of brutality against politically neutral elements and, far from being exploitative, it has been able to dispense substantial amounts of foreign aid. Unlike the VC, it hardly taxes the masses. Its greatest weakness is a shocking amount of venality, which erodes the confidence of the population and of the village officials in the GVN/RVNAF system. Whether it makes the Lao Dong Party preferable is very hard to determine.

As for the American presence, although no country likes foreign troops on its territory (not even all the British liked the Yanks who had come to their rescue in World War II), there is a great difference

between the murderous Nazi units operating in the Soviet Union during World War II, the looting and raping Red Army in Eastern and Central Europe in the 1940s, and the U.S. forces in South Vietnam today. The G.I.s may be noisy, drive recklessly and jeopardize various traditional values, but the overwhelming majority do not murder, rape, or loot. The few widely publicized accusations of real war crimes must be seen in perspective against a total background of unexceptionable behavior.

An army that spends \$350 million a year in-country for goods and services -- besides importing large amounts of supplies for its own needs, of which some fraction inevitably seeps into the local community -- should have a different, less harmful impact on the population than an army that must live off the land. Even if those who give are foreigners and those who take are native or kindred, the impact of material interests cannot be discounted as irrelevant. It would be useful to estimate in as much detail as possible what economic impact the total operations of the two sides have had on the population. In the absence of such estimates, the author is inclined to believe that economic factors do influence the overall situation in South Vietnam in ways that are increasingly detrimental to the Communists.

This is not meant to minimize the suffering that our side has inflicted on the population. But those who have lived through wars know that economic deprivations due to shortages are often stronger irritants than the impact of military operations, perhaps because they affect the whole population rather than just a fraction of it. Physical danger below a certain threshold seems to cause less resentment than does the lack of food and shelter. The war in South Vietnam is in this respect atypical. Unlike other wars, which reduced the goods and services available for the civilian sector because domestic productive capacity and manpower were diverted to the war effort, in South Vietnam the material resources needed for fighting the war and partly for civilian consumption are being imported. There is more prosperity in South Vietnam today than there was in peacetime, and not all of it benefits only the urban elites. The population is aware of the fact that the source of this relative abundance is American aid. Economic factors can drastically increase or decrease the chances of success of our Vietnamization efforts. If the

military balance has changed in our favor and the political balance is also improving, it would be a tragic mistake to jeopardize our achievements through an erroneous economic policy during the transition period of adjustment to Vietnamization.

CONCLUSION: THE IRRATIONAL DISPARITY BETWEEN U.S. MILITARY
AND ECONOMIC EXPENDITURES IN VIETNAM

WHY WE INITIALLY INTERVENED in Vietnam and why we escalated our efforts to such an extraordinary degree between 1965 and 1969 will be the object of debate long after the fighting has stopped. But once the decision was made, in the summer of 1969, to transfer the full burden of fighting to RVNAF and to withdraw American forces as soon as the South Vietnamese were able to defend themselves alone, logic dictated that all our other goals and aspirations had to be subordinated to the primary purpose of Vietnamization.

It is open to question whether we should have tried to achieve economic and political development simultaneously with a major military struggle or whether we should have tried to achieve in South Vietnam in wartime what other, more fortunate Third World countries had failed to achieve in peacetime. Concerning the relationship between insurgency and "nation-building" (which usually is interpreted as creating entities similar to Western nation-states), the lesson of Vietnam is inconclusive. Maybe conditions would not have initially favored insurgency if the ruling elites had shown more wisdom in promoting nation-building. But it is also arguable that the original purpose of the insurgency was to spoil the Saigon government's successful nation-building efforts in order to create conditions favoring the Lao Dong Party.

Be this as it may, once the decision to Vietnamize was made, the problem of nation-building took on a completely new character. No longer at issue was whether the GVN could (and would) create a system in our image, based on political and economic institutions in accordance with our principles and values, but whether it could become a going concern, capable of carrying on in its own fashion, with a minimum of external

resources. Its mission, for the foreseeable future became twofold: continue the resistance against Communist political violence and manage tolerably well the affairs of the South Vietnamese population.

In this context, President Thieu made an important statement on July 16, 1970, when he was being interviewed for "Face the Nation." Morley Safer asked him how long American troops would still be needed in Vietnam. Thieu replied that the rate of withdrawal could be more rapid if aid in the economic and social field were developed together with the Vietnamization program. He added that "When the United States disengages militarily in Asia, they have to engage economically more and more to help the Asian countries to take the responsibility of their own fate."

The American press reported that Thieu "opposed any speeding in the present rate of U.S. troop withdrawals unless the United States were to provide greater financial assistance for economic and social assistance in Vietnam." This crucial remark, which goes to the heart of the problem of Vietnamization, elicited no further comments in the American press. Yet no other issue deserves clearer understanding by policymakers in Washington and by the American people: there is a direct relationship between the material resources available to the GVN and its capacity to dispense with the presence of U.S. forces. The GVN still depends for its survival on either direct American protection, as was the case in 1965, or on the support of RVNAF and at least passive acceptance by the Vietnamese people.

No Vietnamese government, drawn from any part of the political spectrum, can hope to get either majority support or acceptance by a "loyal opposition" at this time. It is, therefore, unrealistic to seek consensus. Support by RVNAF and a measure of popular acceptance depend on the dispensation of economic benefits, avoidance of excessive oppression and corruption, and lack of more appealing alternatives, Communist or other. Therefore, economic aid to South Vietnam cannot be judged by standards applicable to other countries. The United States has been at war for more than six years in South Vietnam, and our economic aid to the GVN must be regarded as an integral part of the war effort. The conventional operational principles of U.S. foreign aid programs are

not necessarily compatible with the purpose of our injection of economic resources into Vietnam. In South Vietnam, American resources should be used with single-minded purposefulness to achieve American security objectives, for which more than 50,000 Americans have died and which have cost the United States well over \$100 billion.

Questions of aid policy and administration have to be asked in this historically unique context. If the United States had spent more than \$4.5 billion on economic aid in the past, could we have spent less than \$100 billion in fighting the war and have saved some of the 50,000 American soldiers whose deaths were, of course, a direct function of the length and scale of military operations? If the United States would consider economic aid to the GVN an integral part of the war effort, could the rate of Vietnamization be increased at savings in defense expenditures and American lives?

The amount of American resources spent at present for the military defeat of the Lao Dong is about fifteen times as large as the amount of American resources devoted to the economic consolidation of the GVN/RVNAF and was last year almost twenty-five times larger. Because of the current division of responsibilities within the U.S. government, it is much more difficult to secure adequate amounts of economic aid than it is to provide much larger sums for military operations. There is no rational basis for this, either in terms of national interest or from the viewpoint of the American taxpayer. Both types of expenditures have the same purpose, namely the achievement of our objectives in South Vietnam, and should be viewed as fungible.

This issue has not received the public attention it deserves, and failure to understand what is at stake could jeopardize Vietnamization. In his comments on "Face the Nation" in July 1970 President Thieu was actually referring discreetly to a request made by the GVN in December 1969, when (according to *The New York Times* of July 8, 1970) the U.S. had been asked for \$212 million to build 202,000 dwellings for soldiers and veterans, and 47,300 tons of high-protein canned foods such as meat and fish.

In early July 1970, while visiting Saigon, Secretary of State William Rogers conveyed to the GVN President Nixon's decision. According to a

statement broadcast at that time over South Vietnamese radio and television, the U.S. had approved "the whole food aid program as requested and a building program of providing materials for the construction of 100,000 housing units to be completed within five years at a total estimated cost of about \$100 million." Apparently only a modest beginning has been made in recent months in building adequate housing for dependents of RVNAF.

It is also significant that President Nixon's budget message for FY 1971 proposed \$100 million more in economic aid for the GVN than Congress had been willing to authorize the previous year under a two-year authorization. These funds were clearly needed in the fight against South Vietnam's rampant inflation and gaping budget deficit. Overdue salary increases for soldiers and civil servants -- the two groups on which the stability of the GVN depends most directly -- could not be made. The argument was that the GVN should first put its financial house in order before receiving more American economic aid.

In early October 1970 the GVN, in response to such criticism, introduced a partial devaluation of the piastre (from 118 to 275 to the U.S. dollar) despite fears of adverse effects on the tenuous popularity of the Thieu regime and the risk of financial panic. Then, on November 18 President Nixon asked Congress for additional economic aid to Vietnam as part of a multinational program, supplemental to the original request for 1971 foreign assistance funds. The request for Vietnam was reduced from the \$100 million proposed in the budget message to \$65 million.

In justifying this request Secretary Rogers, appearing in early December before several Congressional committees, explained that \$50 million was the minimum amount required as supporting assistance for commercial imports and \$15 million additional funds were to be used "to provide added incentive for rapid implementation of the land reform program, which is off to a good start." The Secretary of State stressed "the need to accomplish much-needed agrarian reform," and expressed his belief that the program "will continue to strengthen the Vietnamization process." As part of the supplemental foreign aid authorization, Congress approved, on December 22, 1970, the \$50 million requested for inflation control for the remainder of FY 1971, but denied the Administration the \$15 million for the land reform program.

Such policy decisions must be judged against the background of the total war effort, the incremental cost of which was estimated at \$17 billion in FY 1970, is about \$11 billion in FY 1971 and may drop to \$9 billion in FY 1972. The fallacy of "saving the taxpayer's money" is of the "mistaking the part for the whole" variety. Viewing programs as "cheap" or "expensive" is meaningful only against the whole tragic Vietnam episode, which began with Secretary of State Dean Acheson's announcement in Paris on May 8, 1950:

The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its according economic aid and military equipment to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.

More than twenty years later we still seem to fail to understand that social stability requires much more than superior firepower. Without discussing here the philosophical implications of this outlook, it can be argued in purely analytic (cost-effectiveness) terms that expenditures of the order of a fraction of one percent of the total war effort cannot be viewed in isolation without becoming truly penny-wise but pound-foolish. They must be appraised for their total military and political impact on Vietnamese society, which, it must be remembered, is vastly different from our own, suffering tensions and stresses that we may be quite incapable of understanding.

What is "right" in South Vietnam today cannot be judged in accordance with standards of economic policy applicable to an advanced Western country in peacetime. In terms of abstract justice, one can argue that Vietnamese society should raise from its own resources the means necessary for land reform or any other social reform program on which the survival of its non-Communist regime might hinge. But by the same logic, should we have spent \$100 billion to save a regime incapable of saving itself? If the answer to the latter question is affirmative -- for reasons of American national interest -- then it is not defensible to reject minor additional expenditures that could increase the odds that the outcome of our efforts will be positive.

Unquestionably, one should not push the argument too far and argue that \$15 million for land reform (which is just a little over one-tenth of one percent of the incremental cost of the war for FY 1971) would increase the odds of successful Vietnamization by a specific coefficient. It can only be asserted that land reform would strengthen the present regime. The author does not claim to be able to ascribe quantitative values to an intuitive opinion based on substantive knowledge of the area acquired over a period of many years. Furthermore, he did not write this essay as a special plea for any particular program, but as an appeal for considering the total Vietnamization program in broader perspective.

Some American economic analysts have argued that the GVN should be taught without delay to live within its means, by raising taxes and eliminating inflationary windfalls to members of the ruling elite. But these admirable maxims, derived from Western experience with economic policy, could lead to foolish policy decisions when applied in wartime to a country like South Vietnam, which totally lacks the civic culture of advanced Western political systems and may only be able to survive -- and then hopefully achieve political maturity in later years -- if energized by private interests.

We have sacrificed too much in American lives, treasure, and national reputation in South Vietnam, to be skimpy about the marginal economic costs that might make the difference between success and failure. In the summer of 1970 highly competent economic analysts concluded that the difference between foreign exchange support for an austere policy of imports and taxes and a "lavish" policy would amount to only \$220 million for FY 1971, or two percent of the incremental cost of the war for that fiscal year. Six months later, the Administration obtained merely \$50 million from Congress for that purpose. The difference of \$170 million saved -- however enormous that sum appears in the abstract to any reasonable person -- does not represent a genuine saving to the American people at a time when it is eager to liquidate an unfortunate involvement in a distant and unpopular war. Or, assuming that a rigid ceiling is to be imposed on the total amount to be spent in the future on Vietnam -- which was certainly not the case until now -- is it not imperative to apply modern techniques of program budgeting (PPBS) to the total war effort?

It should be possible to reduce some military categories of expenditures in order to carry out the socioeconomic programs on which the success of Vietnamization will depend just as crucially (though perhaps less obviously) as on the transfer of military equipment and know-how to RVNAF.

It could, in fact, be argued that much larger amounts than anybody has dared suggest should be spent if this would maximize the chances of successful Vietnamization, which will depend in the final analysis on the fighting spirit of RVNAF. Billions have been spent in the last six years on American military operations and on the infrastructure -- harbors, airfields, roads and buildings -- considered necessary for these operations. The termination of these projects and the loss of employment opportunities by the Vietnamese civilians who served the American forces will create unemployment that could reach catastrophic proportions toward the end of the Vietnamization process.

In order to give a real stake in the country to members of RVNAF who with their dependents represent about one-third of the total population of South Vietnam, and to prevent or alleviate the economic crisis that might otherwise accompany Vietnamization, a new construction program as vigorous as the one initiated by the U.S. Department of Defense in 1965 in preparation for American combat operations would make eminent sense *militarily*. Viewed as an integral part of the war effort, such a construction program should be started without delay. It should reach a peak during the crucial period of transition until Vietnamization is completed. It should go beyond President Thieu's request for 202,000 dwellings for soldiers and veterans and include schools and hospitals for the Vietnamese military and their families. It could also include labor-intensive projects to increase the productivity of the South Vietnamese economy, such as irrigation works in the Mekong Delta and other activities that might absorb civilian labor left unemployed by the departure of American forces. This might be done in partnership with some elements of RVNAF, who may be available for civic action projects as long as the enemy initiates only small-scale military operations, in accordance with the protracted war strategy the Lao Dong Party adopted in 1969.

Vietnamization can succeed -- if the complex prerequisites on which its success depends are understood and implemented by U.S. and GVN

policymakers. In decreasing order of urgency in the short run but of increasing importance in the long run, these prerequisites of successful Vietnamization are:

1. RVNAF must be trained and equipped not in accordance with abstract standards of perfection but well enough to deny the NVA/VC forces substantial future military successes.

2. The Thieu regime must be able to consolidate its power not in accordance with Western political standards but in line with Vietnamese experience and capabilities.

3. The economy of South Vietnam must be supported by the U.S., probably for at least a decade, in ways that select from among various conceivable policies those that are compatible with the present political needs of the system.

4. The hope for social justice or at least the rule of law must be nurtured by genuine GVN efforts to implement promised reforms and to combat flagrant cases of brutality and corruption.

APPENDIX: A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF VIETNAM

THE AWAKENING of Vietnamese nationalism took place in the first decade of this century. The victory of Japan over Russia in 1905 acted as a catalyst, in convincing some Vietnamese intellectuals that by acquiring knowledge the peoples of Asia could defeat the Western powers. The first one to respond to this event was a brilliant young scholar, Phan Boi Chau, who had won the mandarinal competition in 1900 but then refused to enter the administration and to cooperate with the French. Instead he had initiated an underground movement of national resistance, had tried to form small armed groups to fight the French, and had written defiant political pamphlets.

In 1905 Phan Boi Chau visited Japan, where he met Western-oriented Chinese exiles who opposed the Manchus, as well as the political leaders of Japan who had modernized their country in one generation, securing for it the power to determine its own political fate. The following year he returned to Japan with Prince Cuong De, a descendent of Emperor Gia Long, whom he had chosen to prepare for the modernized monarchy of a liberated Vietnam. During this second visit to Japan, in 1906, Phan Boi Chau founded his first political organization, the Viet Nam Duy Tan Hoi (Association for the Modernization of Vietnam). He was also instrumental in enrolling Vietnamese students in Tokyo's military academy and in getting more and more young Vietnamese to study in Japan.

Meanwhile, the awakening national spirit of the Vietnamese manifested itself in a modernization movement aspiring for an independent, Westernized Vietnam. The movement took the form of study groups, traveling lecturers and small newspapers financed by patriotic members of the incipient bourgeoisie. Its most important creation was the Free School of Tongking, opened in Hanoi in March 1907 as a privately supported institution, which

offered more than a thousand students a modern education free of charge. Supplemented by the illegal departure of some 200 students to Japan, which at the time was called the "exodus to the East," the educational movement was so rapidly becoming a nationalist weapon that the French colonial administration stepped in after only eight months, closed the Free School of Tongking, and sent hundreds of teachers and other nationalists throughout the country to the prison camp at Poulo Condore, an island 30 miles off the south coast of Vietnam.

Besides alienating the educated Vietnamese, the French colonial administration also antagonized the peasants by levying high direct taxes for local budgets as well as heavy indirect taxes, which caused numerous vexations because of the establishment of salt, alcohol, and opium monopolies. Rural discontent erupted in mass demonstrations, sometimes of a violent character, in the spring of 1908. Normal judicial procedures were suspended and a Criminal Commission tried hundreds of Vietnamese and sentenced some to death.

After the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Phan Boi Chau and Prince Cuong De revived their political organization in Canton, calling it the Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi (Association for the Restoration of Vietnam), which abandoned the notion of a modernized monarchy in favor of a republic. Prince Cuong De now proclaimed himself president of a provisional government. Stimulated by the Chinese Revolution, as they had been in 1905 by Japan's victory, Vietnamese nationalists listened again to the agents of Phan Boi Chau's Association coming from abroad. A few acts of terrorism and some peasant demonstrations led to a new move of repression again involving the arrest of hundreds of nationalists and the execution of a few. The Criminal Commission sentenced Phan Boi Chau and Prince Cuong De to death *in absentia*.

This pattern of nationalist agitation and colonialist repression gave rise to an escalatory pattern of challenge and response culminating in the fateful year of 1930, when no less than 699 persons were executed and more than 10,000 nationalists were jailed for at least two years.

Phan Boi Chau, whose career as a nationalist leader spanned a quarter of a century, was expelled from Japan following a French-Japanese rapprochement. He carried on from Bangkok and then, after the 1911 Revolution in

China, from Canton. In June 1925 he was kidnapped in Shanghai by the French Sureté, brought back to Hanoi, sentenced to hard labor for life, and then pardoned. He lived till October 1940 under house arrest in Hué, and he was not permitted to receive visitors. Joseph Buttinger (in his impressive study *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled*) sums up this first phase of Vietnamese nationalism: "The end of Chau's career marks the failure of a revolutionary movement based only on the political aspirations of the national elite." He points out that the Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi lacked a program responsive to popular aspirations and relied on conspiratorial policies rather than on overt political action. Its methods and its appeal restricted it to the educated elite. Phan Boi Chau remained isolated from the people, although his concern with liberation from French colonialism drew elite attention to his propaganda for more than two decades. Of course, the colonial environment in Vietnam was so totally hostile to the growth of a democratic political culture that Phan Boi Chau would have been prevented from educating the Vietnamese in democratic political participation even if his own views had not been elitist and conspiratorial.

Historians with a Marxist outlook, such as Le Thanh Khoi and Jean Chesneaux, have pointed out that French colonialism changed the class structure of Vietnam by creating big landlords, tenant farmers, and an urban bourgeoisie, new groups that had not existed before the conquest. Such social differentiation was most rapid and profound in the South, in Cochinchina. There the Vietnamese themselves were recent pioneers, much less bound by Confucian traditions than in the rest of the country. In the North, in Tongking, mining and industry had created a relatively strong proletariat, but the bourgeoisie remained weak. In the center, in Annam, colonial and capitalist penetration were weakest, and traditional society was less disturbed by outside forces. The different rates and patterns of social evolution in the three regions of Vietnam were reflected in the dissimilar growth of political movements in these different parts of the country.

In Cochinchina, as early as 1923, a Constitutionalist Party was founded by French-educated professional men, who were expressing the hopes of the national bourgeoisie for greater participation in the

Colonial Council, for equal treatment, for greater opportunities for educated Vietnamese, and for more liberal press laws. The founders of the Constitutionalist Party did not demand independence and were opposed to social revolution. But the French *colons* opposed even these modest reformist claims, and the hostility they encountered prompted the Vietnamese leaders to moderate their demands even further. As other militant groups emerged, the Constitutionalist Party was discredited, especially in Annam and Tongking, where the reformist movement never took hold.

Le Thanh Khoi explains that these early Vietnamese politicians feared social revolution because their economic power was essentially agrarian. They had been excluded by powerful French interests from large-scale industrial and commercial ventures. Unlike a genuine national bourgeoisie, willing to cooperate with the national proletariat, these Southern landlords were afraid of a mass-based nationalist movement that could -- Le Thanh Khoi argued -- after independence turn into a social revolution and initiate a land reform. The author doubts that the Vietnamese landowners acted as rationally as Marxist historians assume on the basis of an analysis of class interests. Their failure to appeal to the masses was probably the result of their elitist outlook and of the social gap separating them from the people. It may also be that they failed to see the opportunity to displace the French bourgeoisie and become themselves, like the Japanese aristocracy, modernizing entrepreneurs.

The lack of economic development in the period before World War II accounts also for the absence of a real Vietnamese middle class. There were only a handful of French-educated intellectuals who wanted for themselves equality of opportunity with the French, especially in senior bureaucratic and professional positions. The nationalist movement after the mid-1920s expressed the discontent of this small, frustrated group, the most sensitive in reacting to French discrimination. One brilliant member of this group was the journalist Pham Quynh, who became Emperor Bao Dai's Prime Minister and supported the Japanese coup against the French on March 9, 1945. A few months later, in August, he was executed by the Vietminh Committee of Liberation in Huế. Pham Quynh might have played a more honorable and constructive role in the life of his country if his early career had not been thwarted by the French authorities, who,

in September 1926, had refused him permission to form a Vietnamese People's Progressive Party.

Deprived of legal channels of expression, the Vietnamese nationalist movement continuously spawned illegal parties. One group, founded in 1924 in Annam, from which it also spread to Tongking, lasted till 1930, changing its name several times until it became the Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang (Revolutionary Association of Vietnam). Drawing on the experience of political prisoners who had spent long years at Poulo Condore reflecting on the causes of their failure, this party tried to develop a strong organization based on five-man cells. It found itself in fierce competition with the early Communist movement, trying to outbid its revolutionary slogans but having little to offer in a social program or a political vision for an independent Vietnam. Its direct revolutionary action left no lasting mark, although it staged some lively campaigns and great demonstrations in its first few years. Eventually the Communists took over entire groups of the Revolutionary Association.

The first Vietnamese Communist group was organized in Canton, China, in 1925. Calling itself the Viet Nam Cach Menh Thanh Nien Dong Chi Hoi (Vietnam Revolutionary Youth Association), it built up a solid underground, and within a few years had several thousand members. Joseph Buttinger says that its program "was both precise and comprehensive," aiming "above all at instigating mass action against the colonial regime." The Communists were not, at first, immune to the factionalism that always seems to have plagued Vietnamese politics. The Thanh Nien split into three rival groups. But the most promising young leaders had been sent to Moscow, and over 250 young men had been trained for clandestine operations at a Communist school in China. In October 1930, Ho Chi Minh, then known as Nguyen Ai Quoc, was able to unite all factions in a single party, the Dong Duong Cong San Dang (Indochinese Communist Party), which was recognized by the Comintern in April 1931. Soon the Communists were organizing strikes, peasant rebellions, and even some local "soviets," which temporarily replaced the French-controlled administration in a number of provinces. Landlords, mandarins, and other rich notables were killed, but no Frenchmen, as if the masses were more interested in social revolution than in the anti-colonialist struggle. In the summer of 1931, the repression

organized by the French resulted, according to Vietnamese nationalist sources, in 10,000 killed and 50,000 deported. In December 1932 the French Governor General reported, prematurely, "Communism has disappeared."

But not only the Communists were the target of French repression in that period. Equally harsh treatment was meted out to members of the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnamese Nationalist Party), which had been created in 1927 by non-Communist nationalists dissatisfied with the Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang (Revolutionary Association) but unwilling to join the Communist Thanh Nien. Unlike previous non-Communist organizations, the VNQDD reached below the intelligentsia, seeking mass support. But whereas the Communists were organizing workers for strikes and peasants for uprisings and were relying on extensive mass action, the VNQDD assumed that the French could be overthrown by a quickly organized military coup. They hoped that native soldiers could be made to rise against their French commanders, occupy the main towns in the country, and install a nationalist regime. The VNQDD started stockpiling arms and manufacturing bombs, and engaged also in individual acts of terror, in the hope that these would weaken the will of the French to resist the uprising.

The founder of the party, Nguyen Thai Hoc, was a twenty-three-year-old teacher. The VNQDD, modelled on the Chinese Kuomintang, whose prestige in Asia was high at that time, gained more sympathy and financial support from the Vietnamese middle class than any previous nationalist movement. In Tongking alone in 1929 the party had 120 cells with 1500 members.

But the VNQDD lacked experienced leadership. When it ordered a general uprising of all major garrisons with Vietnamese troops for the night of February 9-10, 1930, only the Yen Bay garrison rose and killed its French officers. The rebel soldiers were soon defeated and summarily executed by French troops. Eighty VNQDD leaders, including Nguyen Thai Hoc, were sentenced to death, and hundreds were deported. The VNQDD ceased to exist as a party in Vietnam. A small group of leaders survived as refugees in China, where they were supported by the Kuomintang. They returned with the Chinese troops that occupied the northern half of Vietnam in the fall of 1945.

Whereas Vietnamese nationalism was excessively dependent in its first three decades on foreign sources of inspiration and support, such as the resurgent Japan, Kuomintang China, and the Russian-dominated Comintern, Western political philosophy and democratic methods of political organization had a very minor impact. Western experience was obviously not applicable to the problems of a country suffering colonialist repression as ruthless as that of a totalitarian dictatorship. Until the events of World War II brought the Japanese military to Vietnam, Vietnamese nationalists were completely at the mercy of the French secret police, the Sureté.

In September 1940, when the Japanese secured French compliance and stationed 35,000 troops in Indochina, Vietnamese nationalist hopes revived. Refugees from the old Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi, who had led an obscure existence in China, returned to Tongking and started a rebellion, soon to be joined by other nationalist groups, in the mountainous region of Cai Kinh. But the insurrection did not spread, and as soon as the French realized that the Japanese would not interfere, the guerrillas in Tongking were exterminated. A larger, Communist-inspired uprising in Cochinchina in November 1940 was also crushed by the French, whose airplanes and artillery razed entire villages. Therefore, the Vietnamese nationalists waited passively for the Japanese to oust the French, sustained by vague Japanese propaganda efforts appealing to the Vietnamese on anti-white, racist, and pan-Asian grounds. The Japanese encouraged and protected the emergence of certain political groups that had special relationships with them.

The Cao Dai, which started as a syncretistic religious movement in 1919, had been able to mobilize mass support in the South after its leadership was taken over in 1925 by Le Van Trung. By 1938 it claimed 300,000 followers among the rural population in the provinces near the Cambodian border. Pham Cong Tac, who became leader of the Cao Dai in 1935, had political ambitions and saw the potential of the movement as a political party. He established close contacts with Japanese intelligence agents and through them with Prince Cuong De. To prevent Cao Dai cooperation with the Japanese forces, which were about to invade Indochina, the French deported the leaders of the sect to Madagascar in August 1940 and occupied

Tay Ninh, the capital of Cao Daiism. Having failed to prevent the deportation of the top Cao Dai leaders, Japanese intelligence found competent substitute leaders and helped them, under the protection and the financial support of the Japanese political police, the Kempeitai, to rebuild and expand their political activities and to create armed groups in the Southern provinces. Thus protected, the Cao Dai movement continued to grow, despite French hostility. After the Japanese capitulated, it clashed with the Vietminh in 1946, and with President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1955. By then it claimed 1.5 million adherents.

The Japanese also assisted the Hoa Hao, a Buddhist reform sect that arose in 1939 under the leadership of a young mystic named Huynh Phu So, who found himself forced by circumstances into the role of a nationalist agitator against the colonial regime. He prophesied the outbreak of the war, the fall of France, and the coming of the Japanese to Indochina. His prestige grew immensely when events fulfilled his prophecies. Alarmed, the French interned him in a psychiatric hospital and then confined him to Bac Lieu, far away from his followers. In October 1942 the Kempeitai rescued him and kept him safely in Saigon despite French protests.

In 1946, after his Japanese protectors were gone, Huynh Phu So was murdered by the Vietminh, a deed that turned the Hoa Hao into a bitterly anti-Communist group. While under Japanese protection, Huynh Phu So was able to create Hoa Hao armed units, thus establishing a power base for the sect's political influence. Huynh Phu So was never as close to the Japanese as the Cao Dai leaders. He did not share their illusions that the Japanese intended to create a truly independent Vietnam.

As they acquired Japanese weapons, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao bands engaged in wanton violence and plunder in the countryside, unrestrained by their religious leaders, who had only a tenuous hold on them. As Buttinger puts it, when the hour of liberation finally came, "the sects, by their very nature as well as by their association with the Japanese, were little qualified to speak and act in the name of the [Vietnamese] people."

Besides helping the growth of politico-religious sects in the South, the Japanese also encouraged the establishment of the Dai Viet Party, which from the beginning seems to have been split into a number of factions. Several clandestine movements such as the Viet Hung (Restoration

of Annam), Cap Tien (Radical Group) and Quoc Xa (National Socialist), which had been formed in late 1940, merged the following year to become the Dai Viet Quoc Gia Lien Minh (Party of Great Vietnam). French repression forced some of the principal Dai Viet leaders to flee to China. Different groups used variants of the party's name such as Dai Viet Cach Manh (Revolutionary Party of Vietnam) and Dai Viet Quoc Dan (Nationalist Party of Vietnam). In 1942 one young Dai Viet leader, the student Truong Tu Anh, reformed the party and gave it an ultranationalist, totalitarian, anti-Communist, and xenophobic platform, obviously inspired by the ideology of his Japanese protectors. Truong Tu Anh was also murdered by the Vietminh Communists in the summer of 1946.

Meanwhile, the Kuomintang authorities in Southern China had pressured all Vietnamese political groups in exile, in October 1942, into a united front, the Viet Nam Cach Minh Dong Minh Hoi (Vietnam Revolutionary League), in order to make use of the underground contacts that these groups had in Vietnam. But the anti-Communist leaders of the Dong Minh Hoi remained, Buttinger says, "as quarrelsome and organizationally as incompetent after the formation of the Revolutionary League as they had been before." This prompted the Chinese to release Ho Chi Minh from prison at the end of 1942 and make him head of the Dong Minh Hoi, thus inadvertently helping the Vietnamese Communists to seize the leadership of Vietnam's nationalist struggle for independence.

It is not necessary to review here the complex history of Vietnamese politics in the last thirty years. The purpose of the preceding survey was to illustrate the initial inability of the various nationalist parties to provide meaningful leadership for the struggle for independence and to trace the checkered origins of political factions that still claim a major voice in the affairs of the Vietnamese nation. History makes it clear that these parties, despite acts of individual courage and sacrifice, did not make constructive contributions to the welfare of the Vietnamese people, both because they lacked enlightened doctrines and because of their organizational inability to compete successfully with the Vietnamese Communists.

Plagued constantly by factionalism and the lack of broad popular support, the historic parties of Vietnam, established in the period

before the Communists assumed the leadership of the struggle for national independence, survived only as small groups of isolated cadres who followed leaders constantly engaged in political intrigues and intricate, covert maneuvers in the hope of securing some of the status, power, and material benefits of public office.

It would be tempting to explain this peculiar tendency to factionalism and purely self-serving political action as the result of some unique aspects of Vietnamese national character, but the success of the Indochinese Communist Party is sufficient to invalidate any such hypothesis. After a short period of factionalism, the Communists were united by Ho Chi Minh in 1930 and remained under his firm leadership till his death in September 1969. While it might be too early to assert that factionalism will never manifest itself in the Lao Dong Party, no evidence is available so far that this is happening. In any case, forty years of united Communist action and its considerable success are convincing testimony that under strong and ideologically self-confident leadership, Vietnamese can work together, despite the negative record on the anti-Communist side during the years since the end of the Japanese occupation.

The eight years of war fought by the French and their Vietnamese auxiliaries against the Communist-controlled Vietminh accounted for 94,581 killed and 78,127 wounded on the anti-Communist side, including Frenchmen, Vietnamese, and foreigners. But these human sacrifices and the suffering inflicted on the country did not act as a catalyst for a strong and dynamic anti-Communist national movement or party system. Even after the July 1954 Geneva armistice no political organization existed or emerged to challenge the Communists, despite the fact that the agreement stipulated that elections were to be held within two years, thus presenting the anti-Communists a vital challenge.

The government of Prime Minister (and then President) Ngo Dinh Diem lasted more than nine years (1954-1963), but did not advance the political development of South Vietnam. Most former members of the anti-French resistance movement were persecuted on the assumption that they were Communists. No imaginative effort was made to win them over. Furthermore, Diem was so obsessed with the idea of creating a monolithic power base for himself that all non-Communist manifestations of political pluralism

were suppressed, even if it involved incurring the enmity of groups, parties, sects, and minorities that could have been allies against the Communists. The eradication of all political activities not directly controlled by Diem was pursued so tenaciously that when he finally fell from power and lost his life in November 1963, the political void his demise had created could only be filled by the officer corps, the only legitimate group capable of decisive action and enjoying an organized, nationwide power base in the armed forces built up with American aid.

The only lasting political organization created during the Diem period was a conspiratorial elitist group, the Can Lao Nhan Vi Cach Mang Dang (Personalist Revolutionary Labor Party), which had secret cadres in all the institutions of South Vietnam but lacked popular support or appeal. It purported to use Communist organizational techniques to promote an ideology combining Confucian ideals with French humanism and to control a number of mass organizations as its fronts. In reality the Can Lao was only a fraternal organization of elite elements helping each other and, while it lasted, the Diem dictatorship. When the regime collapsed, Can Lao membership was, understandably, a liability, which initially suggested caution in all public endeavors. Then conditions took a favorable turn, and former Can Lao members asserted themselves again in Southern politics.

What made life for Can Lao members especially difficult in the first period after November 1963 was the fact that they were regarded as major culprits in the persecution of the Buddhist political movement, which manifested itself vigorously in the last year of the Diem regime and played a major role in its overthrow. The Can Lao Party was seen as an exponent of Catholic interests, although its founders and cadres included elements of all Vietnamese religious backgrounds, and as a major factor in the persecution of the Buddhists who were seeking revenge after Diem's fall.

Political Buddhism in Vietnam received international attention in 1963, when it came into militant opposition to Diem, with popular following, and acquired public fame. But its covert roots go back at least to 1932, when attempts were made in Hanoi to reform Buddhism, a well-established but not very influential religion in Vietnam, and turn it into a political

base in the nationalist struggle, following the crushing of all other militant groups by the French. A few nationalists became bonzes in order to guide these efforts, which remained confined to a few pagodas, removed from public attention.

Between 1948 and 1951, the Buddhist movement in Hanoi and Hué began to modernize itself and attracted a number of young activists who are prominent leaders today. Various groups rallied in 1961 and 1962 to bring together all Buddhist sects. In January 1964 the Unified Buddhist Association was formally established, but inner rivalries and external pressures resulted again in factionalism after about two years.

Recently, the main groups in the Buddhist political movement were the militant group, led by Thich Tri Quang and based at the An Quang Pagoda in Saigon, and a moderate group, led by Thich Tam Chau and known as the Quoc Tu faction. The militant group opposed the GVN and its American protectors, demanded peace and neutrality, and was occasionally suspected of covert cooperation with the Communists. The moderate group, which seemed to be much less popular, was anti-Communist and supported the GVN, which helped it in 1967 to achieve nominal control of the Unified Buddhist Association.

Some thoughtful observers claim that the Buddhist movement was the only political movement in contemporary Vietnamese history that stood a chance of becoming a genuinely popular alternative to Communism. From the spring of 1963, when it challenged the Diem regime, until the spring of 1966, the Buddhist movement, based at Hué and Danang in Central Vietnam but influential also in Saigon, proved repeatedly that it could mobilize urban mass support under the leadership of its bonzes.

Then, in early April 1966, following several weeks of Buddhist agitation in favor of civilian rule, a constitution, and national elections, the National Leadership Council (the military junta of ten generals which was at that time South Vietnam's top decisionmaking body), decided to use armed force in Central Vietnam against the Buddhist-led "Struggle Force." The conflict with the GVN resulted in the split between militants and moderates that has persisted to this day.

After the events of March-April 1966, the Buddhists abandoned mass action and reverted to traditional Vietnamese conspiratorial methods

and political intrigues, even when the GVN challenged them directly by arresting or sentencing prominent bonzes. A partial reconciliation with the Thieu regime seems to have taken place in the summer of 1970. In the August 30 elections for half of the membership of the Senate, required by the 1967 Constitution, a "Lotus Flower" slate of ten candidates, led by the former Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau, who had resigned from Ngo Dinh Diem's cabinet in 1963 in protest against the persecution of Buddhists, had the support of the An Quang Pagoda. It received the largest number of votes, namely 1,149,597 as against 1,106,288 for the pro-GVN "Sun" slate, which got 1,106,288, and the independent "Lily" slate, which won 882,274 votes. The elections were held nationwide. Each voter could select three slates of ten candidates out of a total of 16 slates. The total number of citizens who went to the polls was 4,325,494, or 65.7 percent of the electorate.

Nowadays Buddhism again plays an important role in the political mythology of South Vietnam, whereas in the 1967 national elections Buddhist political claims seemed grossly exaggerated. In the Upper House elected at that time, out of 60 Senators only 15 were Buddhist, whereas 29 were Catholic. In the Lower House, out of 137 members only 65 were Buddhist, whereas 35 were Catholic, and of the 65 persons who indicated Buddhism as their affiliation only 12-15 had United Buddhist Association support, or some association with political Buddhism. Even after its success in August 1970, the Buddhist movement does not have a political party.

• The Can Lao Party and the United Buddhist Association are the only two political groups formed after World War II worth mentioning here. One could of course prepare a voluminous inventory of the parties, factions, and fronts that have appeared and vanished like ships in the night since 1945. Their primary function was to provide a political platform for some ambitious member of the elite, who proved as incapable as his colleagues of mobilizing lasting popular support and asserting his leadership.